

The College Writer

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PREFACE

 THE CHARGE IS FREQUENTLY made—and possibly with justice—that instruction in English composition is purely formal, that it leads to the achievement of a type of writing which has no counterpart on the printed page. To the extent to which this charge is true it may be accepted as one explanation of the lack of interest felt by most students in the composition course, of the perfunctory manner in which they perform the tasks assigned, and, moreover, of the boredom with which the instructor himself too often approaches *his* task of reading and criticizing student themes.

Several years ago, the late Bernard L. Jefferson and I collaborated in writing a book for the college composition course. That book was published under the title *Creative Prose Writing*. It was an attempt to relate the student's writing to his reading, for the authors believed that he who reads much and well will more surely write with skill and effect, and that he who has tried to create will likewise read with intelligence and appreciation the literary creations of others.

Creative Prose Writing met with friends. We were told that it was stimulating. But from many teachers reports came to us that in restricting the scope of the book largely to description and narration we had limited the usefulness of the book, that it should be expanded to meet all the text requirements of the composition course.

Accordingly, Mr Jefferson and I drew up a general plan for a new text, one to be built upon *Creative Prose Writing*, but to include a fairly full treatment of exposition, more work on diction, a brief outline of grammar, and a handbook. The illness and untimely death of Mr Jefferson left me with the responsibility of providing this new material.

It remains to be said that although the scope of the book has been broadened to include utilitarian types of writing and instruction in matters purely formal, the original thesis has been preserved, namely, that the formalities are to be taught only as a means to the achievement of a good style of writing, not as an end in themselves, and that reading and writing should proceed hand in hand.

For helpful and stimulating suggestions the author gratefully acknowledges his indebtedness to the following colleagues: Dean Edwin Watts Chubb, Professor Hiram R. Wilson, Professor Clinton N. Mackinnon, Professor J. B. Heidler, Professor J. Homer Caskey, and Professor Raymond McQuiston. The author deeply appreciates also the courtesy of many publishers who granted permission to use copyrighted material, and the invaluable assistance rendered by members of the editorial staff of the Odyssey Press.

HARRY HOUSTON PECKHAM

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The Art of Exposition

The Nature and the Technique of Exposition

 IN BEGINNING A STUDY OF the art of writing, we shall do well to consider the significance of what rhetoricians call the four types of discourse: exposition, argumentation, description, and narration. Differentiating these types very briefly and simply, we may say that exposition is explanation, argumentation is discussion, description is word painting, narration is story telling. To put the matter more specifically, we call a treatise on economics expository because it explains the laws governing the production, distribution, and consumption of wealth. We call a plea for isolationism or interventionism argumentative because it discusses a controversial subject. We call a book or an essay depicting the beauties of the English Lake District descriptive because it seeks to do with words what the painter would do with his brush. We call a short story or a novel or a biography or a history narrative because such works relate incidents either fictional or true.

There is, however, a more fundamental, more far-reach-

ing way of considering the significance of these types of discourse—a way by which the four types may actually be reduced to two. In this connection, it should be observed that there are two worlds from which the substance of literature is drawn. One is the external world, a knowledge of which is gained through the five senses. The other is the world of ideas, the world of the mind. Proceeding from these two sources of literature are two fundamental types of discourse: description, which deals essentially with the external world as it is revealed by the senses, and exposition, which is concerned primarily with the world of the mind. Argumentation, since it deals with thought, is a special kind of exposition dealing with the truth or falsity of ideas. Likewise narration, in so far as it is concerned with the external world, becomes a kind of description—a very dynamic and vivid description.

This is not the place for a lengthy or detailed explanation of the different types of discourse; the student will get such explanation as he proceeds through the pages of this book. From the outset, however, he should bear in mind that the material of description is always concrete and that description is therefore inevitably concerned with the external world, the world that is revealed through the five senses. The pleasure of reading pure description is, then, a physical pleasure, and commonly it is also an esthetic and emotional pleasure. The material of exposition, on the other hand, may or may not be concrete, but whether it is concrete or abstract, the satisfaction that one gets from reading exposition is usually mental rather than physical or esthetic or emotional. For example, either the descriptive writer or the expository writer, either the poet or the botanist, may write about a red rose. But, manifestly, the poet and the botanist will write from very different points of view and for very different purposes.

The poet will seek to *depict* the rose in such a manner that the reader will be charmed by its color, its shape, or its fragrance. The botanist, on the contrary, will seek to *explain* the rose in such a manner that the reader will gain an intellectual appreciation of its characteristics and its relation to other forms of floral vegetation. In other words, description is always concerned with presenting images, exposition is primarily concerned with presenting ideas.

1 THE PRACTICAL IMPORTANCE OF EXPOSITION

As we have observed, exposition deals primarily with the world of ideas, the abstract world of the mind. Fundamentally it is not concerned either with vivid sense impressions or with fascinating incidents. It relies generally upon facts and logic rather than upon those more delightful but elusive qualities, the imagination and the emotions. It is the bread and butter rather than the salad or dessert of expression. It is not particularly concerned with the esthetic pleasure that one gets from viewing a landscape or hearing a symphony. Neither is it concerned with the entertainment and the thrill that one gets from reading a good story well told. It does not depict or recount, it informs and explains. Exposition is, in short, the one dominantly practical type of discourse. Without pictures or songs or stories we could perhaps survive, however dull and unattractive life would be, but without knowledge or reason we could hardly exist as human beings.

The practical nature of exposition may be seen in many ways. Exposition, except in such a highly literary form as the familiar essay, is not a type of discourse by which we amuse or entertain one another in our recreational moments, it is the type of discourse by which we make known

our positive needs. Exposition is the language of the market place and the workshop, the schoolroom and the kitchen, in short, it is the language of all the practical affairs of life. A stranger in need of medical attention accosts you on the street and asks you to direct him to the nearest physician's office. In directing him you use exposition. Your professor of engineering asks you to compute the maximum weight that may safely traverse a certain type of bridge under specified conditions. In making and setting forth the computation you use exposition. You go to your dean's office and ask the dean's secretary to indicate to you the several requirements that you must meet in order to qualify for the bachelor's degree. In giving these data she uses exposition. At the close of a fiscal year the treasurer of a campus organization makes an itemized financial report. In making this report he uses exposition. Lectures, recitations, tests, term papers, and dissertations all belong in the category of exposition. The same is true of proclamations, bills of sale, contracts, writs, and manuals.

2 COMMON FORMS OF EXPOSITION

Among the common forms of exposition designed for general reading we may consider the following: (1) explaining processes, (2) defining words, (3) expounding customs, manners, and phenomena, (4) presenting abstract ideas, (5) expressing opinions, (6) analyzing character.

Explaining processes—

A simple example of "explaining processes" would be the set of directions that appears on a can of cleaning fluid or a bottle of shoe polish. A more elaborate example would be an article on the manufacture of automobile

tires or on the preparation and laying out of a tennis-court. In short, any detailed, systematic explanation of how a thing is done would be considered "explaining processes." The following paragraph will serve as an illustration of this form of exposition.

Briefly, the construction of a pneumatic tire can be summarized as consisting in—first, the preparation of the cord material, which is now a specialized operation on which many of the largest cotton mills in the world are exclusively employed. The cord, after passing from the cotton mills, is first treated in the tire factory by a coating of rubber applied to both sides of the sheets of cord fabric. These rubberized sheets are then cut into bias strips of suitable widths, and brought to case building machines on which the casing is built up, and the wire rings which retain the finished cover upon its rim, are enclosed within the edges of the casing. Various details of fabric and rubber are added in the form of chafing strips, filler strips, rubber insulation plies and cotton breaker strips, and finally the tread and side wall coverings are added, the whole forming a tire cover in a raw state.¹

—Wallace H. Paull "Tire Rubber Tire Manufacture"

Defining words—

"Defining words," one of the chief functions of a dictionary, is clearly a form of exposition, for by definition one explains the meaning of a word. One clarifies by the process of elimination, setting forth the bounds or limits of what a word signifies. Let us examine, for instance, the *Webster* definition of the noun *radical*, used in a political sense. First we note that the word *radical* is derived from the Latin adjective *radicalis*, which means "having roots" or "proceeding directly from the root." Thereby we see

¹ *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Fourteenth Edition) Vol. XXII. Copy right 1929, The Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc. Reprinted by permission.

that a *radical* change would not be a slight or a superficial change, but a change that would go to the very *root* of things. And we see, further, precisely what the *Webster* means when it defines a *radical* as, "In politics, one who advocates sweeping changes in laws and methods of government with the least delay." We see finally, by inference, what a *radical* is not, as well as what he is. In other words, we fix the bounds or limits of the noun *radical* by differentiating a radical from other kinds of persons who are dissatisfied with the *status quo*. In this connection, we observe that a *radical* is not a mere *liberal* or "advocate of greater freedom," nor is he a mere *progressive* or "advocate of going forward", a radical is "an uprooter." Thus it is manifest that when we define a word we must use explanation and clarification. "Defining words" is, therefore, a form of exposition.

Expounding customs, manners, and phenomena—

Under the head of "expounding customs, manners, and phenomena" we place the most characteristic articles in a periodical such as the *National Geographic Magazine*. For example, in the October, 1938, issue of that monthly there appears an article entitled "The Farthest-North Republic"—an article setting forth the manners, customs, institutions, occupations, recreations, racial qualities, geographical characteristics, and governmental practices of Finland. On a larger scale the same form of exposition is to be found in a book such as *The American Commonwealth*, by Lord Bryce, or such as *America Comes of Age*, by Andre Siegfried. It is not to be supposed, however, that this type of exposition is confined to geographical, social, or political subjects. The type may be just as well exemplified by a paper on Columbia University, or Roosevelt High School, or the Philadelphia Orchestra, or Wana-

maker's Department Store, or the New York Subway System, or Passenger Air Transportation, or the Notre Dame Coaching System. The following passage is illustrative of this form of exposition.

In the autumn of 1928, Antioch adopted a system of "autonomous study, for all students above the sophomore year. Under the new plan upperclass students are not required to attend classes. The work for an entire term is outlined and the student then is left to master the subject in his own way, coming to the instructor only for necessary help, for discussion, and for inspiration.

To develop traits not easily reached by class room work, such as initiative, self-reliance, responsibility, courage, and adaptability, and to help practical adjustment to life, both men and women students spend half their time at college and half in practical economic occupations, in alternate five-week shifts. Each working position is continuously filled, one student working while his or her alternate studies. These "co operative" students work over a radius of a thousand miles, with two hundred employers, in a wide variety of callings, the positions being chosen because of their educational value to the particular students. Self support is incidental, but the students, to a large degree, meet college expenses.²

—Arthur E. Morgan "Antioch College"

Presenting abstract ideas—

"Presenting abstract ideas" is the form of exposition used when a writer or a speaker explains and discusses some philosophical term, such as *Platonism*, or some theological term, such as *Calvinism*, or some scientific term, such as *gravitation*, or some economic or political term, such as *free trade*. This form of exposition is often closely related to "defining things", in fact, it almost inevitably

² *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Fourteenth Edition) Vol II Copyright, 1929 The Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc. Reprinted by permission.

involves definition. Generally, however, "presenting abstract ideas" goes much further than definition, it expatiates upon details that would hardly be included in a mere definition. For example, a presentation of *Calvinism* would hardly be adequate without an explanation of who John Calvin was, why he quarreled with the Roman Catholic Church, and how he differed in viewpoint from such other pioneer Protestants as Martin Luther and Nicholas Ridley. The following paragraph is an example of this form of exposition.

HEDONISM [is], in ethics, a general term for all theories of conduct in which the criterion is pleasure of one kind or another. Hedonistic theories of conduct have been held from the earliest times, though they have been by no means of the same character. Moreover, Hedonism has, especially by its critics, been very much misrepresented owing mainly to two simple misconceptions. In the first place Hedonism may confine itself to the view that, as a matter of observed fact, all men do in practice make pleasure the criterion of action, or it may go further and assert that men ought to seek pleasure as the sole human good. The former statement takes no view as to whether or not there is any absolute good; it merely denies that men aim at anything more than pleasure. The latter statement admits an ideal, *summum bonum*—namely, pleasure. The second conclusion is the tacit assumption that the pleasure of the hedonist is necessarily or characteristically of a purely physical kind; this assumption is in the case of some hedonistic theories a pure perversion of the facts. Practically all hedonists have argued that what are known as the "lower" pleasures are not only ephemeral in themselves but also productive of so great an amount of consequent pain that the wise man cannot regard them as truly pleasurable; the sane hedonist will, therefore, seek those so called "higher" pleasures which are at once more lasting and less likely to be discounted by consequent pain. It should be observed, however, that this choice of

pleasures by a hedonist is conditioned not by "moral" (absolute) but by "prudential" (relative) considerations³

—"Hedonism"

Expressing opinions—

The vast majority of newspaper editorials, as a glance at the editorial columns of any metropolitan daily will show, are expressions of personal opinions. In the November 16, 1940, issue of the *New York Times* there are six editorials. One of these editorials deplores the wanton bombing of the English city of Coventry and declares that the consequent loss in airplane production in Coventry must be made good in American factories. A second editorial commends the administration in Washington for appointing an outstandingly able University of Chicago professor, Dr. Harry A. Millis, to the chairmanship of the National Labor Relations Board. A third editorial discusses British strength at sea as our American first line of defense and expresses the hope that this strength may continue. A fourth editorial finds satisfaction in the fact that the New York Curb Exchange, as well as the New York Stock Exchange, is now supervised by "public governors" who represent the interests of the customer rather than those of the broker. A fifth editorial finds in the Collier Trophy a worthy incentive for greater safety in commercial aviation. A final editorial, inspired by the recent naming of Stephen C. Foster to the Hall of Fame, finds this action to be "a popular choice." Illustrative of editorial expression of opinion are the following paragraphs.

What can we do [to aid Britain further]?

In the first instance we can, and should, repeal the

³ *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Fourteenth Edition) Vol. XI. Copyright, 1929 The Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc. Reprinted by permission.

neutrality act Then and only then will it be possible for us to permit American ships to return to the high seas from which they should never have been withdrawn Then will the American merchant marine be available for the transportation of foodstuffs and other materials to British ports

Secondly, the Johnson act should be repealed It is an act which served us badly in time of peace It is serving us even worse in time of war It should be repealed not only to enable this country to advance credits to the British but in order to repudiate once and for all the wholly unwarranted assumption that we entered the World War to protect our investments abroad

And if need be we ought to be willing to employ our own ships in the convoy service, at least within the limits of the American neutrality zone If that were not enough we should be happy to see them sailing into the ports of Liverpool and Southampton ⁴

—Excerpt from editorial, "Life-Line Menaced"

Along with editorials should be mentioned book reviews, dramatic criticisms, and sports commentaries All of these are primarily expressions of personal opinion So are all books and articles on controversial subjects—unless, of course, the book or the article happens to be written from a strictly objective, strictly dispassionate point of view But when one is writing upon a controversial subject, one finds it extremely difficult to be objective As a rule, the person who is too *disinterested* to take sides is likely to be too *uninterested* to write a lively article Try to imagine, for instance, a Harvard or a Yale sports writer who would take a detached attitude toward the Harvard Yale game Imagine President Roosevelt or Herbert Hoover, Jay Franklin or Frank Kent, writing dispassionately about the New Deal Imagine Herr Josef Goeb-

⁴ *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, November 20, 1940 Reprinted by permission

bels or Mr Winston Churchill giving an objective appraisal of the Nazi government One further observation should be made regarding the expression of personal opinions This type of exposition is as argumentative as it is expository, in other words, it seeks to convince as well as to enlighten

Analyzing character—

Another form of exposition is that form known as the character sketch or character analysis, which the student should be very careful not to confuse with the description of a person Analysis of character is expository, not descriptive It is not concerned with externals such as stature or complexion or voice, gait or gestures or apparel It does not depict a man's physical characteristics, it explains or appraises his mental and spiritual qualities It is interested in a man's judgment or his generosity, his stupidity or his penuriousness, rather than in the color of his hair or the shape of his nose or the texture of his coat Notice the following passage from Robert Southey's *Life of Nelson*

Never was any commander more beloved He governed men by their reason and their affections they knew that he was incapable of caprice or tyranny, and they obeyed him with alacrity and joy, because he possessed their confidence as well as their love "Our Nel," they used to say, "is as brave as a lion and as gentle as a lamb" Severe discipline he detested, though he had been bred in a severe school, he never inflicted corporal punishment if it were possible to avoid it, and when compelled to enforce it he who was familiar with wounds and death suffered like a woman

When you have read the foregoing passage you feel that you have learned much about Lord Nelson's tenderness and sense of justice, you have, on the other hand, learned

nothing about what the great English admiral looked like. Of course it is generally legitimate and sometimes desirable for a writer to combine description with character analysis. Undoubtedly if one were to read Southey's *Life of Nelson* from beginning to end, one would get plenty of vivid impressions of the famed British seaman's outward appearance, for the one armed, one-eyed, bemedaled hero of Trafalgar was as picturesque and colorful as he was brave and resourceful and popular. In our present chapter, however, we are concerned with the expository aspects of writing—not the descriptive

Expository forms in combination—

We have just finished considering the most common forms of written exposition. It is not to be supposed, however, that these forms are necessarily kept separate and distinct in actual practice. The student who does much reading will be bound to notice in a great deal of expository writing, particularly in books and long articles, that the forms of exposition are just as likely to appear in combination as separately. Let us take a single illustration to establish this fact. In an earlier paragraph we discussed ~~the~~ form of exposition devoted to expounding customs, manners, and phenomena, and as an example of that form we cited an article on the republic of Finland. Any lengthy article on Finland, however, is almost certain to be much more than merely an objective expounding of customs, manners, institutions, and so forth. Let us suppose, for example, that the writer finds certain things about Finland that he especially likes, and certain other things that he especially dislikes. In voicing his mixture of approval and disapproval he is giving expression to personal opinions. Let us suppose, further, that he becomes so deeply interested in some great Finnish

hero that he devotes a paragraph to the personality of that hero. In such a paragraph the writer will undoubtedly employ character analysis more than any other form of exposition. Let us suppose, finally, that he traces the successive steps that led to the founding of the present Finnish republic and the drafting of its constitution. In tracing these steps he will use explanation of a process just as truly as if he were telling his reader how to build a canoe or how to make pecan fudge.

[NOTE—The text of this book has been interspersed with hundreds of exercises. It is, of course, not to be assumed that every student will work all of these exercises. Probably no one student will work all of them. Some instructors may wish to use all of the exercises, assigning different exercises to different students. Other instructors will doubtless prefer to omit certain exercises altogether. The authors hope that the assignments which appear on this page and elsewhere in the book will be regarded as merely suggestive, not dogmatic and arbitrary. The really earnest student will wish to devise at least a few exercises of his own—exercises inspired but not dictated by those which the authors have given.]

EXERCISES

- 1 Study ten recent magazine articles with a view to classifying them as to expository form (explanation of processes, expression of opinions, presentation of abstract ideas, etc.) In these articles, to what extent do you find these expository forms used in combination? Specify
- 2 Write a short theme on one of the following subjects
Why I Enrolled in — College (or University)
Why I Plan to Study Engineering (Law, Medicine,
Commerce, Theology, Agriculture)
My Most Difficult Study
My Definition of Democracy
The Blessings of Being an American

3 EXPOSITORY METHODS

The objective—

When we come to the study of description we shall learn about the importance of dominant tone. In exposition the corresponding quality is singleness of objective. Just as in any well-rounded piece of description the writer is likely to set forth one predominant impression, so in any well-conceived work of exposition the writer is almost certain to reveal a single controlling purpose, a singleness of objective. In other words, a unified exposition is not a conglomeration of miscellaneous paragraphs that have nothing in common except that they all happen to bear loosely upon the same general subject. An article on South America, for example, might give a wealth of varied information, but if it did not set forth some one predominant fact about that continent it would, in the final analysis, be confusing and ineffective. The good expository writer is just as goal-conscious as is the baseball batter or the football halfback who is carrying the ball. He has a controlling purpose—a purpose that is just as definite as scoring a run or making a touchdown. Moreover, since he is not playing a competitive game, the writer is much surer than the athlete of attaining his goal.

Let us assume, then, that the competent expository writer has a single objective for his book or his article and that he has that objective clearly in mind before he begins his composition. A big question that confronts him as he arranges and rearranges his outline is this: At what point can I most advantageously announce my objective to the reader?

Deductive announcement—

There is much to be said in favor of announcing the objective at the very outset. This method of announce

ment, known technically as the deductive method, has the manifest advantage of letting the reader know just what the writer intends to do with his object, just what his main point is. When we witness a baseball game we know perfectly the precise direction in which the batter will run if he gets a chance to run at all. When we witness a football game we know equally well which goal-line the ball carrier will try to approach. When we read a deductively written exposition we are never in the dark as to the writer's aim. Consequently, in a great many expository compositions, especially compositions on difficult or abstruse subjects, we find the objective announced deductively.

This method is admirably exemplified by Gamaliel Bradford's character sketch of William Cowper, a chapter in the book *Bare Souls* (1924). "How strange," says Bradford in his opening sentence, "for a man to go through a great part of his life with the absolute conviction that he was unalterably condemned to hell." And in this sentence Bradford sounds his keynote. The entire chapter is devoted to the elaboration, the elucidation, and the stressing of this one paramount idea that poor Cowper believed himself to be eternally damned. The reader thus gets a clear, unified conception of one of the most remarkable personalities in English literary history. From the very first sentence of the sketch the writer makes no secret of his objective.

Inductive announcement—

Not always, however, is it best for a writer to announce his objective at the beginning. The deductive method may be supremely good for clearness, but clearness is by no means the only desirable quality in a literary composition. Almost as important is interest, and the best way

to arouse and sustain the reader's interest is to keep him in suspense. As a rule, we should not wish to read a novel or see a play if we knew from the outset just what the denouement was going to be. Similarly, most of us care little about witnessing an athletic contest, the outcome of which is a foregone conclusion. To return to the analogy of the baseball batter, the spectator knows that the batter's immediate objective is first base. He does not, however, know whether the batter will succeed in reaching that objective. Neither does he know the strategy by which the batter hopes to reach that objective. Will the batter "wait the pitcher out" and thus try to get a base on balls? Or will he try to get a single? And if the latter, will he get it by means of a deft infield bunt or by means of a low line drive neatly planted between the infield and the outfield? Or will he try to slam the ball with all his might, hoping for extra bases, perhaps even a home run? The true baseball fan is almost as much interested in these questions as in the question of whether the batter gets to first at all. Fortunately for the public interest in athletic games, the spectator does not immediately know the players' full intent. And fortunately for the reader's interest in expository writing, the deductive method is not the only method by which a writer may announce his objective. There is another important method, the inductive, by which the writer withholds the announcement of his objective until late in the composition or until the very end.

For an example of this method the student may turn to Lawrence Scudder's "Raising the National Income," an article in the November, 1938, issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*. Although it is Scudder's obvious purpose to tell us how our national income may be raised, he does not let us into his secret until well beyond the middle of the

article Instead, he begins by speaking of his long experience as a certified public accountant Then he dwells upon his conviction that big business is relatively inefficient And presently he informs us how, by pursuing a hobby in his own field of work—the hobby of keeping a theoretical set of books on Uncle Sam's affairs—he has satisfied himself as to what is the real cause of our national troubles But not until he has worked the reader into a state of most lively curiosity does he enlighten him upon what we ought to do about our difficulties The secret finally comes out when Scudder says 'Let the Federal Government enact a tax on that portion of a taxpayer's income which is not respent in a manner that produces income to others' The brief remainder of the article is devoted to an elucidation of the objective sentence just quoted It will be seen that this inductive method of announcing the objective operates upon the same principle as an exciting narrative, it creates and holds the reader's interest by keeping him guessing

Exemplification—

The student must note that the deductive and the inductive methods of announcing the objective are expository methods that apply principally to the composition as a whole What about methods within the paragraphs? One of these methods is that of exemplification When this device is employed, the writer usually begins by making a general statement, and then proceeds to enforce his statement by means of concrete examples This is what John Macy has done in the following passage from *The Spirit of American Literature*

Irving was a child of fortune His father was in comfortable circumstances, and the young man was able to indulge in three pleasures which indulged his talents innocent

idling among the people of New York, especially in the older parts of the town and along the water front, writing and publishing for the sport of it, and travelling in Europe. The delicate state of his health made it necessary, or advisable, that he should make sea voyages. Since his invalidity did not assume painful forms nor fetter his work either as a man of letters or man of affairs, it may be regarded as fortunate, for it won him dispensations which his father would not perhaps have accorded to a robust young man. His gentle fancy was nourished by well being, by leisure to indulge his amiable indolence, to sit on the bank and watch life stream by, to catch a glimpse of a comic old face in the crowd or the fluttering ribbon on a girl's bonnet.⁵

—Chap. II, pp. 19–20

The advantage of using the method of exemplification lies in the fact that the average reader is more interested in concrete particulars than in abstract generalities. In fact, he is inclined to demand the former as proof that the latter are true.

Comparison and contrast—

The use of exemplification often involves what may be considered a separate and distinct expository method, namely, comparison and contrast. In an article entitled "Meeting the Crime Wave," in the January 19, 1921, issue of the *Nation*, Joseph Gollomb compares and contrasts the police man hunting methods employed in England with those employed in France. He points out that whereas the men of Scotland Yard show true British sportsmanship and fairness in their attitude toward their prey, the Parisian detectives are much more prone to trick suspects into making confessions. The use of comparison and contrast offers the double advantage of concreteness and sharp re-

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lief It follows a well-known psychological principle, which will be considered in our study of description that of accentuating blackness by placing it upon a white surface, or that of stressing the gigantic by putting it in juxtaposition with the diminutive⁶

Enumeration and analysis—

Many good expository paragraphs treat diverse items under a unified general head For example, in the opening chapter of *The Flowering of New England*, Van Wyck Brooks develops the thesis that the eighteenth-century Boston mind was an odd conglomeration of multifarious strains warm and chivalrous Toryism, passionate rebelliousness, incorrigible Calvinistic religious fervor, Massachusetts frigidity, and Yankee acquisitiveness And since mere enumeration would fail to convince the reader of the truth of the proposition, Mr Brooks analyzes causes and effects This method may be highly effective, provided the writer does not include too many items Ordinarily, four or five main items are about as many as the reader can well assimilate

Miscellaneous arrangements—

There is, of course, no one best way of arranging one's material in an exposition Of the six common forms of exposition considered earlier in this chapter, only one form—the explaining of processes—lends itself to an automatic order The common order for explaining processes is, manifestly, the chronological In virtually all other forms of exposition the writer must choose his own arrangement of details, and his choice will depend a great deal upon the nature of his subject If, for instance, he is expounding a subject that has difficult ramifications, he

⁶ See below, p 254

may well start with some simple proposition and proceed from that to more complex matters. For instance, in the following paragraph on Einstein's theory of relativity, Dr. E. E. Slosson has begun with a very simple sensation and has proceeded thence to show what complicated questions may arise therefrom.

Suppose you wake up some morning in a Pullman berth and look out of the window to see where you are. You find your view blocked by a passing train on the next track. Now if you do not feel any jar of your car and cannot catch sight of the landscape beyond the other train you cannot tell whether (1) your train is moving forward and the other train is standing still, or (2) your train is standing still and the other train is moving backward, or (3) whether both trains are moving in opposite directions, or (4) whether both trains are moving in the same direction but your train faster. It is obvious that the trains are getting past one another. You can measure their speed of parting as accurately as you please. But all you can perceive is the relative motion of the two trains. You begin to wonder whether there is such a thing as absolute motion, whether there is any real difference between rest and motion. Is there any possible way of telling whether your train is in motion or not, if all you can see out of the window is some object that itself is moving? Suppose the windows were all curtained, how could you find out whether you were moving forward or backward or standing still? ⁷

—E. E. Slosson *Easy Lessons in Einstein*, pp. 3-4

If a writer's subject involves physical space or historical perspective, he may go from the near to the remote, or from the remote to the near, or from cause to effect. In the following paragraph, for example, the writer traces the growing importance and efficiency of the American railroad from its inception to the middle of the nineteenth century.

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In the 1830's many little railway lines, rarely more than twenty or thirty miles in length, were built. On these tiny railroads were worked out many of the problems that had to be solved, such as how tracks should be laid, how rails should be built, how engines and cars should be constructed and how they should be coupled together. In the '40's longer railway lines were constructed, and in 1854 the young city of Chicago, near the head of Lake Michigan, was connected by an all rail route with the Atlantic coast.⁸

—Mabel B. Casner and Ralph Henry Gabriel *Exploring American History*, Chap. V

If a writer is dealing with a group of topics of varying importance, he may place his topics in an ascending or a descending scale, in other words, in a climactic or an anti-climactic order. Professor Parrington has, indeed, used these two orders in combination in the following paragraph about Benjamin Franklin:

It is to little purpose that certain shortcomings of Franklin are dwelt upon. 'There is a flower of religion, a flower of honor, a flower of chivalry, that you must not require of Franklin,' said Sainte Beuve, a judgment that is quite true and quite obvious. A man who is less concerned with the golden pavements of the City of God than that the cobblestones on Chestnut Street in Philadelphia should be well and evenly laid, who troubles less to save his soul from burning hereafter than to protect his neighbors' houses by organizing an efficient fire company, who is less regardful of the light that never was on land or sea than of a new model street lamp to light the steps of the belated wayfarer—such a man, obviously, does not reveal the full measure of human aspiration. Franklin ended as he began, the child of a century marked by sharp spiritual limitations. What was best in that century he made his own. In his modesty, his willingness to compro-

⁸ Copyright 1931 Harcourt Brace & Co. Reprinted by permission.

mise, his open mindedness, his clear and luminous understanding, his charity—above all, in his desire to subdue the ugly facts of society to some more rational scheme of things—he proved himself a great and useful man, one of the greatest and most useful whom America has produced⁹

—Vernon Parrington *Main Currents of American Thought*, I, 178

In the foregoing paragraph, it should be observed, the second sentence follows the order of anticlimax, both as a whole and in each of the three comparisons made. The final sentence, on the other hand, follows the order of climax.

As regards the whole matter of miscellaneous arrangements, the expository writer should constantly bear in mind two vital facts. In the first place, whatever the subject may be, it is almost always possible for the writer to be systematic, almost never excusable for him to be haphazard. In the second place, since exposition is explanation, the writer must strive to the utmost for an arrangement that will best facilitate the reader's comprehension of the subject. A haphazard order is bound to invite confusion.

Generalized description—

For reasons that will become apparent to the student when he enters upon its study, description is sometimes to be found in writings that are predominantly expository. In fact, in all expository writings that have occasion to deal with concrete things the presence of more or less description is inevitable. In this connection, it should be pointed out that there is one kind of description that is essentially expository in purpose, namely, generalized description. By generalized description we mean descrip-

⁹ Copyright, 1927, Harcourt, Brace & Co. Reprinted by permission.

tion of a typical rather than of an individual phenomenon. For example, the description given in *Webster* of the typical Mongolian as "of a yellowish complexion, coarse straight black hair, scant beard, a broad flat face with small nose and prominent cheek bones, and eyes which often have a narrow and slant appearance," deals manifestly with a type rather than with an individual. Its purpose, moreover, is expository rather than descriptive, that is, it seeks to inform rather than to stir the reader's imagination. For contrast we might take the description of any character in *The Good Earth*, Pearl Buck's well-known novel of Chinese life, in which each Mongolian described is an individual Chinese—in which, in other words, the author's purpose is imaginative rather than informative, purely descriptive rather than fundamentally expository. By way of further illustration, Keats's delineation of the bird in his famous *Ode to a Nightingale* is individual, imaginative, literary, purely descriptive. On the other hand, an ornithologist's description of the European nightingale is typical, practical, matter-of-fact, fundamentally expository.

Diagrams and maps—

The use of diagrams and maps, although not strictly a matter of writing, constitutes an important expository method, for these are often exceedingly useful adjuncts to expository writing. Sometimes, indeed, they are indispensable. The textbook on geometry that did not contain diagrams would be as unthinkable as the text book on geography that did not contain maps. In this connection, the student should bear in mind that whenever he can supplement his own expository writing with helpful illustrative drawings, he should not hesitate to do so.

4 UNITY, COHERENCE, EMPHASIS

For more than two thousand years it has been agreed by rhetoricians that the three essential qualities of effective literary composition are unity, coherence, and emphasis. The ways in which these fundamental principles apply to the sentence, to the paragraph, and to the entire composition will be indicated forthwith.

Unity in the sentence—

A sentence that expresses one complete thought, and no more, is said to possess unity. A well-organized sentence may, of course, contain more than one idea, but it expresses only one complete thought. If I write, "Abraham Lincoln was a very tall man and was the sixteenth President of the United States," I am manifestly violating the principle of sentence unity in two ways: in the first place, I am failing to indicate any correlation between Lincoln's physical stature and his incumbency of the presidency, in the second place, I am failing to express a single central thought. To write, "Abraham Lincoln, who was a very tall man, was the sixteenth President of the United States," would be to improve the sentence, for it would eliminate the second weakness mentioned above. It would, however, leave the reader still in doubt as to why Lincoln's height should be mentioned at all in connection with his distinguished political position. One common and flagrant violation, then, of the principle of sentence unity is the introduction of irrelevant matter.

An even more common and likewise more flagrant violation of this principle is to be seen in the phenomenon known as the comma fault or illiterate comma. An example of this type of ununified sentence is afforded by the following: "Ohio is a thickly populated state and has more than its share of large cities, the largest of these cities is

Cleveland" The foregoing may be an objectionable sentence in more than one way, but its single unpardonable error is the placing of a comma after *large cities* In an attempt to improve this sentence, the very first thing that the writer should do is to substitute a period for that comma, clearly, "The largest of these cities is Cleveland" does not belong in the same sentence with the statement about Ohio as a whole In this connection, the student should realize that the comma fault is much more than an error in punctuation Primarily, it is an error in grammar, for when a writer places a comma at the end of a sentence, he shows that he is too illiterate to know what constitutes a sentence

Since a unified sentence expresses a *complete* thought, the fragmentary sentence is quite as lacking in unity as the sentence that includes too much In other words, it is inexcusable to write a phrase or a dependent clause as if it were a sentence The following, for instance, is very bad "After the game we went to the Buckeye restaurant Where we ate a hearty dinner" Obviously, the writer should have placed a comma instead of a period after the word restaurant His use of the period there exemplifies the period fault or illiterate period And the period fault, like the comma fault, is as much an error in grammar as it is an error in punctuation

Unity in the paragraph—

A paragraph that develops one complete topic, and no more, is said to possess unity From the standpoint of unity, then, there are three kinds of bad paragraphs first, the fragmentary paragraph, second, the paragraph that contains irrelevant matter, third, the paragraph that undertakes to develop more than one topic Let us suppose, for example, that one begins with the topic sentence,

"Throughout the nineteenth century, Boston was the literary capital of the United States " In the first place, since this is a topic sentence it should be developed in a single paragraph, not in two or three paragraphs In the second place, this paragraph should contain no mention of the industry, the commerce, the politics, or even the music and art of Boston, unless the writer could immediately show a close relationship between any of these affairs and the literary pre-eminence of the New England metropolis In the third place, it would be undesirable to add at the end of such a paragraph that since the dawn of the present century Boston has lost her literary supremacy to New York The topic thought that New York is our twentieth century literary capital should be the nucleus of a separate paragraph

Unity in the whole composition—

A literary composition that treats one central theme or undertakes to establish one thesis, and no more, is said to possess unity For example, the thesis of Van Wyck Brooks's book *The Flowering of New England* is that during the middle years of the nineteenth century the region between the Canadian boundary and Long Island Sound, and particularly eastern Massachusetts, was the heart of the greatest cultural renaissance yet known in America In the course of the volume Mr Brooks takes up such miscellaneous topics as commerce, industry, climate, ethnology, politics, and religion, but whenever he mentions any one of these he is scrupulously careful to relate it to his main thesis

Quite as much diversity of topics will be found in Bernard DeVoto's essay "Main Street Twenty Years After," which appears in the November, 1940, issue of *Harpers Magazine* And in Mr DeVoto's article, as in Mr Brooks's

book, there is complete unity of theme and thesis. At first glance the reader would see little correlation among such topics as W P A, fashion magazines, swimming pools, university extension, soda fountains, phonograph records, newspapers, razor blades, and radio, yet Mr DeVoto has skilfully managed to make all of these extremely heterogeneous topics contribute to his single thesis that Middle Western villages today are incalculably more smart and sophisticated than they were a score of years ago.

Coherence—

The attainment of coherence in any unit of expression involves two successive steps: first, a clear and logical arrangement of words; second, a careful use of whatever connectives may be necessary. The process of attaining coherence in one's writing is, therefore, closely comparable to the process of assembling a picture puzzle or a dissected map of the United States. Obviously, in the case of the latter, one's first task is to determine precisely where each piece must go; one's second and final task is to fit the pieces together. The piece representing Kentucky, for example, cannot go in between the pieces representing Wyoming and Colorado, respectively. And after it has been discovered that Kentucky belongs between Indiana and Tennessee, the pieces must be joined; it will not do to leave a No Man's Land between states. This analogy is entirely apt, except for the fact that in literary composition there is seldom just one inevitable arrangement of words and larger units of expression. Just as seldom, however, is there much opportunity for latitude.

Coherence in the sentence—

In a coherent sentence the predicate will usually follow the subject, and the modifiers will always be placed

where they logically belong In such a sentence the conjunctions, the prepositions, the conjunctive adverbs, and the pronouns will be chosen and placed with the utmost care In such a sentence there will be no illogical coordination or subordination, no obscure comparisons, no unwarranted shifts in subject, person, number, voice, mode, or tense In such a sentence, if there are parallel ideas, these ideas will be expressed in parallel constructions Specific kinds of incoherent sentences can be treated to much better advantage in the *Handbook* than in this part of the text, but the following sentences will afford a few examples of incoherence and coherence

MISPLACED MODIFIER I have only seen him once

COHERENT I have seen him only once

ILLOGICAL AND CLUMSY COORDINATION I do not like mathematics, but I bravely registered for trigonometry, but I dropped the course in November

COHERENT Although I do not like mathematics, I bravely registered for trigonometry I did, however, drop the course in November

UNWARRANTED SHIFT IN VOICE Our escape was so narrow that it will always be remembered

COHERENT Our escape was so narrow that we shall always remember it

LACK OF PARALLELISM The director told her to speak more distinctly and that she should face the audience

COHERENT The director told her to speak more distinctly and to face the audience

Coherence in the paragraph and the whole composition—

The principles of arrangement and connection apply quite as obviously to the successive sentences in a paragraph and to the successive paragraphs in a composition as to the successive words and elements in a sentence. In

other words, sentences and paragraphs in a coherent composition are arranged in a clear, logical order, and they bear a clear, logical relation to each other

Transitional devices—

It is, however, not sufficient that sentences and paragraphs be well arranged and logically related to each other, their relation must be made apparent to the reader. Hence good literary style makes use of words and phrases known as transitional devices. To expect a composition to function coherently without these transitional devices is like expecting a railroad train to function at all without coupling devices. On general principles, the same transitional devices that serve to link sentences and sentence elements will serve equally well to link paragraphs. The chief of these devices are conjunctions, conjunctive adverbs, and pronouns.

Pure conjunctions—as distinguished from conjunctive adverbs—are much more serviceable to connect the elements within a sentence than to connect the larger units of composition. In fact, it is the *sole* function of subordinating conjunctions to connect main clauses and subordinate clauses. More varied is the use of co-ordinating conjunctions, since the latter may connect words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and even paragraphs. Perhaps you were told by your elementary or your secondary school teacher that you must never begin a sentence with *and* or *but*. If so, no longer believe her. She was merely perpetuating an old and now discredited pedagogical tradition. As a matter of actual practice, expert writers do not hesitate to begin sentences and even paragraphs with *and* or *but*—though they do this sparingly rather than frequently.

One of the most valuable devices for connecting both

co ordinate clauses and sentences is the conjunctive adverb To establish this fact requires no lengthy discussion The student can readily appreciate the transitional effectiveness of such words as *therefore*, *hence*, *consequently*, *however*, *nevertheless*, *furthermore*, and *moreover*, as well as such phrases as *on the other hand* and *in the second place* And, by a little investigation, he can see that such words and phrases function just as well in the opening sentence of a paragraph as in any other sentence, in other words, that they connect paragraphs just as firmly as they connect sentences or independent clauses

Another extremely useful type of transition word is the pronoun, since a pronoun usually has an antecedent If a pronoun and its antecedent happen to be in the same sentence, that particular pronoun does not serve as a link between sentences If, however, a pronoun stands in one sentence, and its antecedent stands in the preceding sentence, that pronoun becomes automatically a transition between the two sentences And, manifestly, a pronoun in the first sentence of a paragraph might very properly have its antecedent in the preceding paragraph Hence the pronoun, like the conjunctive adverb, may connect paragraphs as well as sentences and sentence elements

The conjunction, the conjunctive adverb, and the pronoun are, then, the principal devices of transition There are, however, a few other devices—notably repetition and announcement One English writer who was markedly successful in using transitional repetition was Matthew Arnold By repeating such words as *Hebraism* and *Hel-lenism* and such phrases as *sweetness and light*, Arnold often carried his reader astutely from sentence to sentence and from paragraph to paragraph—and he was usually careful not to weary the reader with excessive repetition The words that we have italicized in the following passage will

show how skilfully Arnold used this device of transition by repetition

The *pursuit* of perfection, then, is the *pursuit* of *sweetness and light*. He who works for *sweetness and light*, works to make reason and the will of God prevail. He who works for machinery, he who works for hatred, works only for confusion. *Culture* looks beyond machinery, *culture* hates hatred, *culture* has one great *passion*, the *passion* for *sweetness and light*. It has one even yet greater!—the *passion* for making them prevail. It is not satisfied till we all come to a perfect man, it knows that the *sweetness and light* of the few must be imperfect until the raw and unkindled masses of humanity are touched with *sweetness and light*. If I have not shrunk from saying that we must work for *sweetness and light*, so neither have I shrunk from saying that we must have a broad basis, must have *sweetness and light* for as many as possible.

—Matthew Arnold *Culture and Anarchy*, Chap. I

As regards the transitional use of announcement, the student has only to recall how frequently he has heard this device in public addresses. Note, for instance, the firm coherence of the following brace of sentences: "I have just pointed out the chief immediate causes of the Civil War. I will now take up the chief immediate effects of that conflict."

An extensive study of the best exposition will show that many sentences and many paragraphs are not linked by any transitional words or phrases whatsoever. Frequently two successive sentences or two successive paragraphs are so logically connected in thought that they do not have to be welded by any rhetorical contrivance. Thus the writer may avoid the artificial, mechanical effect produced by the unremitting use of *however's*, *moreover's*, *and's*, and *but's*. Regarding this point, however, the

student will do well to bear in mind two facts first, it is better to be mechanical than to be incoherent, second, the inexperienced writer is seldom in danger of using too many transitional words or phrases

The following brace of paragraphs will serve as a good example of coherence in the larger units of composition

To understand the popular *fiction* of the last quarter of the old century in America, one must go back to the spiritual pabulum upon which the writers of *that fiction* were fed in childhood and in youth Even the best of *them* and most cultured, went as children to *Sunday school* There *they* learned something more than the *Bible* and something different from the *Bible's* stark realities They "took out" *Sunday-school books* The *Sunday-school books* were generally published and distributed under the auspices of the American Tract Society, a Boston concern which thrived in Tremont Street with a branch in New York in Nassau Street These *Sunday-school books* essayed *fiction* and the *fiction* had one pattern For it was based upon just one philosophical tenet—that virtue is rewarded by material counters and vice punished by material castigations When one said that the wages of sin is *death* there was no nonsense about interpreting *death* as spiritual decay *Death* meant *death*, at least a broken leg or a bashed head or a taut rope or a railroad accident provided by a careful Providence *which* kept books scrupulously and well with all poor sinners These pious tales mostly concerned children, good little boys and girls and bad little boys and girls, *and* the bad little boys and girls were always punished by calamity or lingered in a life of sin and shame, encountering disaster along *their* painful way to the portals of hell, *and* the good little boys and girls either were rewarded with great treasure and good fortune or died and went straight to heaven It was upon *this* meat that the little literary Caesars of our seventies and eighties were fed as children Of course *they* grew up, read books, perhaps not *Sunday-school books*, written out in the big world, went to college, came to

question, to challenge and to deny the moral precepts that had been pounded into *them* as youths. *But* the challenge and denial were superficial. When *they* set up *their* universes in *their* stories or poems, there skulking in the background were the police court gods with whiskers *who* somehow managed to reward virtue and to punish vice. Rarely was a writer of *that* gay golden day able to shake off entirely the *Sunday-school* philosophy with *which* the American Tract Society had tainted *his* youth.

One must not mistake the philosophy of *that* day for a gloomy philosophy, *for* it was not. *Hell* was cooling off. The *hell* of the eighteenth century was pretty well crusted over. The skating was good *there*. Scholarship had justified the mockers and the ribald had their following. Frank Stockton and H. C. Bunner told their *merry tales* and sold them to the best magazines. *But* in the *merry tales* often lurked a poisonous villain or a pestiferous saint, the *one* to be punished with whips and scorpions, the *other* to be rewarded by the hand of the king's daughter and half of the kingdom. In the popular fiction of *that* day were precious few *unhappy endings*. *For unhappy endings* would indicate that virtue was unrewarded by material counters or earthly blessings of some sort. Writers were probably intelligent enough to wish that they could end their stories without playing providence to their heroes and villains, *but* writers knew, *and* publishers reminded *those* who forgot, that the public was imbued with the philosophy of a moral government of the universe *which* punished sin and rewarded virtue with substantial, understandable demerits or earthly tokens of divine affection and esteem.¹⁰

—William Allen White "Fiction of the Eighties and Nineties" *American Writers on American Literature*, Chap. XXVIII. Edited by John Macy.

Analysis of the order followed in the foregoing passage will show that Mr. White has arranged his principal

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thoughts in the following clear, easily comprehensible steps (1) To understand the work of late nineteenth-century American novelists, one must know the spiritual and cultural influences that molded these persons in their formative years (2) One of the chief of these influences was that of Sunday-school library fiction, which stressed the idea that virtue is rewarded and vice is punished (3) Most of the rewards and punishments set forth in this fiction were material rather than spiritual (4) So memorably was this Victorian Sunday-school philosophy set forth that persons once exposed to it never fully outgrew it (5) This reward-punishment philosophy, combined with the optimistic philosophy of more "liberal" and worldly Victorians, impelled popular fictionists to give their stories happy endings

Analysis of the connective devices used in Mr White's paragraphs may best be made by a careful inspection of the words that we have italicized Such inspection will show that pronouns, conjunctions, adverbs, parallel phrasings, and repetitions all play their parts The student should examine these devices carefully and note for himself wherein they are serviceable He should note further, irrespective of our italics, that some of Mr White's sentences are connected most closely by thought rather than by any particular kind of transition words

Emphasis in the whole composition—

A writer achieves emphasis in four main ways by arrangement, by proportion, by announcement, and by mechanical devices

Emphasis in the sentence—

Since ideas vary greatly in importance, some sentence elements must be made more emphatic than others A

sentence containing no especially emphatic word or phrase or clause would be almost inconceivable—almost as nearly impossible as a word containing no accented syllable. Most inexperienced writers, however, do not realize the full possibilities of emphasis in the sentence. The principal means of obtaining emphasis within the sentence are terseness, inversion, suspense, antithesis, balance, and mechanical devices.

Terseness—

A terse sentence is one that is free from superfluous or unnecessarily lengthy words. It is a sentence whose very economy of expression impresses the hearer or the reader forcibly. Compare, for instance, the following sentences which express the same thought:

VERBOSE AND UNEMPHATIC I must insist that you take your
departure without further delay
TERSE AND EMPHATIC Go at once

Inversion—

A sentence element put in an unusual position is likely to be emphatic, for it is bound to attract special attention. It has the same psychological effect as a painting, a sofa, or a reading lamp that is moved to an unwonted position in one's living room. *Blessed are the meek*, for example, is more emphatic than the more naturally ordered *The meek are blessed*. For the same reason, *Silver and gold have I none* is more emphatic than *I have no gold or silver*. And, for the same reason, a sentence beginning with an adverbial modifier is likely to be more emphatic than a sentence beginning with the more customary adjective modifier or substantive. Compare, for example, the following sentences:

NATURAL, UNEMPHATIC Falstaff is perhaps the most fascinating of all the comic characters in Shakespeare
 INVERTED, EMPHATIC Of all the comic characters in Shakespeare, perhaps the most fascinating is Falstaff

Suspense The periodic versus the loose sentence—

Closely related to inversion is suspense, the principle upon which the periodic sentence is built. A periodic sentence is the opposite of a loose sentence, it is a sentence in which the reader is held in suspense until the very end. A loose sentence, on the other hand, is one that completes a statement before the end of the sentence is reached. The following sentences will serve very well to illustrate the distinction between these two types of sentence structure.

LOOSE Mark Twain was the greatest humorist that America has yet produced, and to most readers his very name connotes mirth, yet he was one of the most pessimistic of men.
 PERIODIC Although Mark Twain was the greatest humorist that America has yet produced, and although to most readers his very name connotes mirth, he was one of the most pessimistic of men.

By scrutinizing the foregoing sentences, the student will perceive that the "loose" sentence has two pauses at each of which a statement is completed after *produced*, and also after *mirth*. He will perceive, likewise, that the "periodic" sentence has no such pause. Of these two sentences, the "loose" is obviously the more natural, and the "periodic" is just as obviously the more emphatic. Suspense, or periodicity, is one of the most useful means of producing emphasis in sentence structure. Manifestly, however, it should not be employed so frequently as to weary the reader or to create an impression of forced effort on the part of the writer.

Antithesis and balance—

Antithesis is a rhetorical device that places opposite ideas in juxtaposition and in parallel phrasing. A good example of antithesis is afforded by the two subordinate clauses in the following sentence from Macaulay's *History of England*: "The Puritans hated bear-baiting, not because it gave pain to the bear, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators." An equally good example of antithesis is afforded by the two independent clauses that comprise the following sentence from Dr. Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*: "The style of Dryden is capricious and varied, that of Pope is cautious and uniform." Notice how in each of these quoted sentences the parallel structure and the contrasting ideas accentuate each other in such a way as to make the effect of emphasis inevitable. Antithesis, used skilfully, is very effective, but it can easily be overdone. Used to excess, it becomes irritatingly artificial, moreover, it may tempt the writer to distort the truth for the sake of expressing ingeniously conceived contrasts.

Balance, like antithesis, employs parallel phrasing, but, unlike antithesis, it does not necessarily use contrasting ideas. In the following sentence from Hazlitt's essay on Pope, the phrases which we have italicized afford a good example of balance: "If, indeed, by a great poet, we mean one who gives *the utmost grandeur to our conceptions of nature*, or *the utmost force to the passions of the heart*, Pope was not in this sense a great poet." As a rhetorical device, balance has much the same advantages and drawbacks that antithesis has. Used sparingly and with discrimination, it produces a desirable effect of suspense. Used too frequently, it wearies the reader and makes him somewhat distrustful of the writer's accuracy or intellectual honesty.

Mechanical devices—

Individual words and phrases are sometimes emphasized by means of mechanical devices, such as italics, bold-face type, and small capitals, especially the first named of the three. Thomas Carlyle was fond of this method of emphasis, as may be seen from the following sentences, all of which appear in his *Sartor Resartus*

Will the whole Finance Ministers and Upholsterers and Confectioners of modern Europe undertake, in joint stock company, to make one Shoeblack HAPPY?

Only such *overplus* as there may be do we account Happiness, any *deficit* again is Misery

Foolish Soul! What act of legislature was there that *thou* shouldst be Happy?

Carlyle's penchant for this method of emphasis has not found much favor with the majority of good writers. In general, it is too crude, too obvious, too patently a confession that the writer has not arranged his words to the best advantage. As the late Professor Woolley has truly observed, a writer should not use italics for emphasis "unless there is some specially good reason—as, for instance, the fact that obscurity would result from lack of emphasis." In this connection, the student should notice that only in the last of the three Carlyle sentences quoted above is mechanical emphasis necessary for the sake of clarity. In other words, *thou* really calls for italicization, it needs to be emphasized, and it could probably not be emphasized in any other way. Similarly, in the following sentence from a recent monograph the italics are used legitimately for emphasis. "So tolerant was Dr. Holland of Unitarianism that many of his orthodox brethren suspected him of *being* a Unitarian."

*Emphasis in the paragraph and the whole composition
by arrangement—*

Sentences, like words, are often made emphatic by being placed in positions in which they will attract the most attention. As a rule, the most emphatic positions in any unit of expression are the beginning and the end, for at these two points the reader's interest is naturally at the highest pitch. Of these two points the more strategic is, of course, the end. In other words, it is important that the reader should get an interest-arousing impression at the outset, it is even more important that he should have an interest-retaining impression at the conclusion. The following paragraph from Henry Thomas Buckle's *History of Civilization in England* is illustrative of emphasis by arrangement.

The history of Spain, during this period, is the history of one long and uninterrupted success. That country, recently torn by civil wars, and distracted by hostile creeds, was able in three generations to annex to her territory the whole of Portugal, Navarre, and Roussillon. By diplomacy, or by force of arms, she acquired Artois and Franche Comte, and the Netherlands, also the Milanese, Naples, Sicily, Sardinia, the Balearic Islands, and the Canaries. One of her kings was emperor of Germany, while his son influenced the councils of England, whose queen he married. The Turkish power, then one of the most formidable in the world, was broken and beaten back on every side. The French monarchy was humbled. French armies were constantly worsted, Paris was once in imminent jeopardy, and a king of France, after being defeated on the field, was taken captive, and led prisoner to Madrid.

In the foregoing paragraph, the author starts emphatically by making a strong general statement that whets the

reader's curiosity. He ends even more emphatically by telling of the greatest in a series of brilliant triumphs.

Emphasis by proportion—

In the paragraph and in the chapter, sheer bulk is often impressive. For instance, if the literary historian devotes a longer paragraph or a longer chapter to Shelley than to Southey, the reader rightly concludes that the writer wishes to emphasize the achievements of the former poet above those of the latter. Paradoxically, however, as we have already seen, the short sentence or the short word is likely to be more emphatic than the long. Its very terseness, as has been pointed out, tends to make it so.

Emphasis by announcement—

Sometimes a writer may make a statement emphatic simply by declaring it to be so. Such words as "The following topic is of prime importance" or "I am now about to mention the greatest consideration of all" are bound to focus the attention of the alert reader.

EXERCISES

1 Study ten recent magazine articles with a view to classifying them as to expository methods used in different paragraphs.

2 Analyze at least a dozen of these paragraphs from the standpoints of unity, coherence, and emphasis. Point out and classify the transitional words and phrases that you find.

3 Study several paragraphs of Chapter III of Macaulay's *History of England* for examples of antithesis, balance, and parallelism.

4 Write a brief expository theme on some subject that enables you to use comparison and contrast to particularly good advantage.

5 EXPOSITORY STYLE

Clearness and correctness are the first requisites of a good expository style, but they are not the only requisites. A writer's diction, grammar, and syntax may be meticulously correct, but at the same time lamentably ineffective. The good writer, then, is not content with using words and sentences that have the merely negative virtue of freedom from error, he chooses the very best and most serviceable that he can find.

Choosing the right word—

Since a later chapter is devoted to the very important consideration of diction, we shall not now discuss that consideration except in a very general way. Here and now, however, we must point out that the good writer weighs thoughtfully the relative merits of general and specific words, abstract and concrete words, that he reflects upon the rich possibilities of figures of speech that are both apt and fresh, and that he realizes the importance of exercising as much care in the choice of his nouns and verbs as in the choice of his adjectives and adverbs.

Variety of sentence structure—

Few matters pertaining to the art of literary composition are more important than sentence structure, and few are more chronically neglected by the inexperienced or the half-trained writer. It is far from sufficient to write one grammatical sentence after another, and to arrange one's sentences in a logical order. Unless the writer takes studious pains to vary his sentence structure, his composition will fall as flat as yeastless bread. A succession of sentences, all of about the same pattern, is almost as boring and irritating to the discriminative reader as is a

repetition of flabby, inane words Many an instructor has been afflicted with the irksome task of plodding through freshman themes—and senior term papers—that are as monotonous in sentence structure as the following paragraph

Nevertheless French liberalism slowly won its victories, for it needs high walls to keep out ideas The romantic philosophy was excluded from drawing-rooms and counting houses, and ostracized in society and politics, but it slipped quietly into Boston by the door of theology, and took lodgings in the homes of the first families The gospel of Jean Jacques changed its name and arrayed itself in garments cut after the best Yankee fashion, and thus it presently walked the streets of Boston and spoke from its most respectable pulpits, under the guise of Unitarianism The heretical doctrines of the excellence of human nature and the perfectibility of man were preached to Federalist congregations most persuasively, and consequently simple minded merchants did not repudiate them and assert the total depravity of their neighbors, instead, they approved the doctrines and cheerfully paid their pew-rent It was a respectable and bloodless revolution, and under its discreet disguise Unitarianism accomplished for New England the wide dissemination of eighteenth century French liberalism—the same thing that Jeffersonianism had accomplished for the South and West It opened the New England mind to fresh ideas, for the intellectual renaissance was to come out of Unitarianism With this renaissance came transcendental philosophies, social reforms, enlarged conceptions of democracy, and Utopian dreams, and these made New England count most effectively in the developments of the half century

Not even well-chosen diction can redeem such a paragraph as that One patent difficulty with the paragraph is that six of its seven sentences are compound, the remain-

ing sentence is compound-complex. Another difficulty is that from beginning to end the paragraph is made up of sentences that are rhetorically loose. The periodic sentence, with its inverted phraseology and its stimulative element of suspense, is totally absent. A third difficulty with the paragraph is the monotonous regularity with which the co-ordinating conjunctions recur, the conjunction *and*, for instance, appears fifteen times in the course of the seven sentences.

Could such a paragraph be written in a fresh, interesting, forceful style? Most assuredly it could. Indeed, here is the way in which Vernon Parrington *did* write it.

Nevertheless French liberalism slowly won its victories. It needs high walls to keep out ideas. Excluded from the drawing rooms and counting houses, ostracized in society and politics, romantic philosophy slipped quietly into Boston by the door of theology, and took lodgings in the homes of the first families. Changing its name and arraying itself in garments cut after the best Yankee fashion, the gospel of Jean Jacques presently walked the streets of Boston and spoke from its most respectable pulpits, under the guise of Unitarianism. The heretical doctrines of the excellence of human nature and the perfectibility of man were preached to Federalist congregations so persuasively that instead of repudiating them and asserting the total depravity of their neighbors, simple minded merchants approved the doctrines and cheerfully paid their pew-rent. It was a respectable and bloodless revolution. Under its discreet disguise Unitarianism accomplished for New England what Jeffersonianism had accomplished for the South and West—the wide dissemination of eighteenth century French liberalism. It opened the New England mind to fresh ideas. Out of Unitarianism was to come the intellectual renaissance, with its transcendental philosophies and social reforms, its enlarged conception of democracy and its Utopian dreams, which made

New England count so effectively in the developments of the half century¹¹

—Parrington *Main Currents in American Thought*,
Vol II, Book III, Part III

An analytic comparison of the foregoing paragraph with the other quoted paragraph on the same subject will show why Mr Parrington's rendition is by far the better of the two. Of Mr Parrington's nine sentences, six are grammatically simple and the other three are complex. To employ so large a proportion of simple sentences might easily make for monotony, but Mr Parrington has avoided this pitfall by skilfully varying his beginnings. In other words, he has begun two of his six simple sentences with participial phrases. He has, moreover, begun two of his three complex sentences with prepositional phrases. The result is that four of his nine sentences are essentially periodic. And, as a matter of fact, one of the remaining five sentences—the sentence beginning with the words *The heretical doctrines*—is partially periodic.

One reason why immature writers use too many loose sentences is that the English sentence order is naturally loose, to create a periodic sentence, one must deliberately transpose its normal order—usually by beginning with some phrase or some dependent clause. Another reason is, frankly, mental laziness, to create a loose sentence, one may begin writing without having previously gone to the bother of thinking one's sentence through to the end.

Paragraphing—

In your high-school course in English composition you undoubtedly learned the fundamental rules of paragraphing. You learned not merely such mechanical matters as

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indention, but also the more abstract fundamentals. You learned, for instance, that a good expository paragraph is a group of sentences which develop a single topic, that the gist of a good expository paragraph may be stated concisely in one sentence, which, if it is actually present in the paragraph, is known as the topic sentence, that the topic sentence comes usually at the beginning of the paragraph, but that sometimes it may come more effectively at the end. In addition to these fundamentals you doubtless learned some technical rules for paragraph development—rules which, in all probability, you have forgotten. Of course the memorizing of such rules will seldom enable a student to write effective paragraphs. The main point to bear in mind in this connection is that good expository paragraphs are developed largely according to the methods explained earlier in this chapter (see above, pages 16–25). For the rest, the student will get his most satisfactory results through observant reading, straight thinking, and diligent practice.

Good paragraphs are both independent and interdependent. They are independent in the sense that they develop separate topics, they are interdependent in the sense that they all relate to the larger subject treated in the composition as a whole.

6 AROUSING AND SUSTAINING THE READER'S INTEREST

It is again time to remind the reader that mere correctness, mere clarity, mere conformity to rules will not insure a successful piece of exposition. The really good expository composition does not stop with informing the reader, it takes hold of him. As we have observed through the course of this chapter, a number of factors contribute toward producing the desired effect. Well chosen and well executed methods, accurate and colorful words, vig-

orous and varied sentence structures, well-constructed paragraphs, firm and graceful transitions—all of these play their significant parts

It remains to be added that the whole mental attitude of the writer is quite as important as are his materials, his methods, and his style. Someone has remarked that nothing succeeds like success. To paraphrase that statement, we may say that nothing interests like interest. The writer who would arouse and sustain his reader's interest must himself be and remain interested in his subject. A good expository composition is as practical and as attractive as the best store in town. It begins brightly and invitingly, for only the attractively filled and tastefully arranged show-window will tempt prospective customers to come inside. Its materials, its methods, and its workmanship are all first-rate, for no good shop can afford to keep inferior merchandise or inefficient and discourteous clerks. It ends even more impressively than it begins, for the customer's most abiding memory should be his feelings at the close of a highly satisfactory transaction.

EXERCISES

1 Select for analysis a number of expository articles in current or recent issues of *Harper's Magazine* or the *Atlantic Monthly*.

2 Indicate the forms of exposition that you find in the articles you have selected. To what extent do you find these forms used in combination?

3 Analyze the expository methods employed in five or six of these articles. In your analyses, consider methods used within paragraphs as well as in the complete articles.

4 Apply similar methods of analysis to the illustrative selections that follow this set of exercises.

5 Study the diction in the illustrative selections. Point out words and phrases that you consider especially effective.

Write a short theme explaining your conclusions about the diction of any one of these selections

6 Study transitional devices, using for this purpose the magazine articles that you have selected as well as the illustrative selections, in order that you may more fully observe transitions between paragraphs. Cite instances of sentences or paragraphs that are so logically connected in thought that they need no transitional words or phrases

7 Write a theme showing how the reader's interest is aroused and sustained in some one magazine article

8 Write a theme explaining some process with which you are so familiar that you do not have to consult any work of reference

9 Write a short exposition about the high school from which you graduated, the college you are now attending, some business establishment for which you have worked, or some organization of which you are a member. Be sure to make your theme expository. As far as possible, exclude all narrative and descriptive elements

10 Write a character sketch of your roommate or some other very intimate acquaintance. Make your theme strictly expository. Do not try to write a miniature biography, and do not tell anything about your subject's outward appearance

ILLUSTRATIVE SELECTIONS

PAPER MANUFACTURE

The problem of the paper maker is to make a felted web, fabric, or tissue of cellulosic fibres and of appropriate uniform thickness, strength, color and surface. For this purpose the fibres are "beaten" in water, *i e*, cut and bruised, so that the cellulose composing them may become more or less "hydrated," by inhibition of water, to form a wet pulp of adequate cohesive quality. This wet pulp, as a thin even layer, is then put onto a wire fabric or screen to allow the removal of the superfluous water, and thereafter the wet web of pulp, thus formed, is finished and dried in appropriate manner to

produce the paper, in the form in which it comes to the consumer. These operations may be done by hand or by machine. In olden days the beating was actually done by hand process, with a pestle and mortar, but it is nowadays invariably done by machine. The making of the felted web, on the wire, is still done by hand, but only for making the very highest class of so-called "hand made" papers, and it involves a very skilful craftsmanship which attains and maintains its highest development in the "hand made" paper industry of Great Britain.¹²

—Charles J. J. Fox "Paper Manufacture"

PROCEDURE IN EDUCATION

That in education we should proceed from the simple to the complex is a truth which has always been to some extent acted upon, not professedly, indeed, nor by any means consistently. The mind grows. Like all things that grow it progresses from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous, and a normal training system being an objective counterpart of this subjective process, must exhibit the like progression. Moreover, regarding it from this point of view, we may see that this formula has much wider applications than at first appears. For its *rationale* involves not only that we should proceed from the single to the combined in the teaching of each branch of knowledge, but that we should do the like with knowledge as a whole. As the mind, consisting at first of but few active faculties, has its later completed faculties successively awakened, and ultimately comes to have all its faculties in simultaneous action, it follows that our teaching should begin with but few subjects at once, and successively adding to these, should finally carry on all subjects abreast—that not only in its details should education proceed from the simple to the complex, but in its *ensemble* also.

—Herbert Spencer *Education Intellectual, Moral, Physical*, Chap. II

¹² *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Fourteenth Edition) Vol. XVII. Copy right, 1929. Reprinted by permission.

THE AGRICULTURAL SOUTH

The foreign traveler who journeyed across the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century found life in the South very different from that in the North. There were but few cities in the southern States. Of these New Orleans, still bearing evidence of French and Spanish occupation, was the most important. There were few factories in the South, although, as the middle of the nineteenth century approached, several iron foundries appeared at Atlanta, Georgia. Canals were rare, because rivers were plentiful, and artificial waterways were not needed. The building of railroads in the South was slow. The most striking difference between the sections, however, was that practically all Southerners were farmers, while the men of the North followed many different callings. Southern farmers, moreover, produced but few crops, tobacco in Virginia and Kentucky, sugar in Louisiana, rice in the coast region of South Carolina, and cotton nearly everywhere. Cotton was king—by far the most important product of the South. Almost the whole life of the region depended on the snow white fibers of the cotton plant.¹⁸

—Mabel B. Casner and Ralph Henry Gabriel *Exploring American History*, Unit V

THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY PURITAN

He had been bred in a family circle where his earliest memories were filled with the echoes of Biblical speech, twice each day he had heard it in family worship, in reading and prayer, and at least four times on Sundays. As soon as he had passed his elementary schooling he had been headed for college and a further education that should further equip him to “foil the ould deluder, Satan.” In this advanced academy he had followed with minor modifications the pursuit of the seven liberal arts—grammar, logic, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music. Grammar, logic, and rhetoric meant the study of these subjects in Latin. The whole program was

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now intended to promote and reinforce the local Protestant orthodoxy Under a college president recruited from the pulpit, "moral philosophy" was taught him in senior year "Natural" philosophy was glanced at, but natural and biological science were never allowed to conflict with the Biblical story of creation, literally interpreted, or with the so called Biblical chronology which dated the creation of man in the year 4004 B C "Speculative" philosophy—the secular fields of metaphysics, ontology, teleology, and so on—was regarded as dangerous if not sacrilegious Of the world in which he lived, of his own body and mind, of the social order in its social behavior, of any art except oratory, of any literature as literature, he learned nothing in college And the highest honor the college could confer on him was the privilege of delivering in Latin a series of platitudes in the commencement program¹⁴

—Percy H Boynton *Literature and American Life*,
Chap I

LORD MELBOURNE

William Lamb, Viscount Melbourne, was fifty eight years of age, and had been for the last three years Prime Minister of England In every outward respect he was one of the most fortunate of mankind He had been born into the midst of riches, brilliance, and power His mother, fascinating and intelligent, had been a great Whig hostess, and he had been bred up as a member of that radiant society which, during the last quarter of the eighteenth century, concentrated within itself the ultimate perfections of a hundred years of triumphant aristocracy Nature had given him beauty and brains, the unexpected death of an elder brother brought him wealth, a peerage, and the possibility of high advancement Within that charmed circle, whatever one's personal disabilities, it was difficult to fail, and to him, with all his advantages, success was well nigh unavoidable With little effort, he at

¹⁴ Copyright 1936, Ginn & Co Reprinted by permission

tained political eminence. On the triumph of the Whigs he became one of the leading members of the Government, and when Lord Grey retired from the premiership he quietly stepped into the vacant place. Nor was it only in the visible signs of fortune that Fate had been kind to him. Bound to succeed, and to succeed easily, he was gifted with so fine a nature that success became him. His mind, at once supple and copious, his temperament, at once calm and sensitive, enabled him not merely to work, but to live with perfect facility and with the grace of strength. In society he was a notable talker, a captivating companion, a charming man. If one looked deeper, one saw at once that he was not ordinary, that the piquancies of his conversation and his manner—his free-and-easy vaguenesses, his abrupt questions, his lollings and loungings, his innumerable oaths—were something more than an amusing ornament, were the outward manifestation of an individuality that was fundamental.¹⁵

—Lytton Strachey *Queen Victoria*, Chap. III

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The Research Paper

☞ THE WRITER OF DESCRIPTION usually gathers his best materials through direct contacts, he writes best with his eyes upon the objects. If, for instance, he wishes to depict the streets of Buenos Aires, he realizes that the most excellent of travel books and photographs will be but a feeble substitute for an actual visit to the Argentine. In a comparable situation is the writer of narrative, particularly the novelist or the short story writer. In delineating scenes and people he is, of course, himself a describer, but his reliance upon direct experience goes much further than that. All of his most vivid and convincing characters will be persons whom he has known through direct contact rather than through the vicarious experience of reading.

1 THE SOURCES OF MATERIAL FOR EXPOSITION

In the particular of gathering materials the expository writer is in a very different situation from the describer or the narrator. Since he is fundamentally more concerned with ideas than with sense impressions or incidents, he

may get his best inspiration, directly as well as indirectly, from reading. Like Matthew Arnold's ideal man of culture, he particularly desires contact with the best that has been thought and said. And where will he get this contact to better advantage than on the printed page?

Direct personal experience—

To an appreciable extent, however, even the expository writer may obtain valuable materials from his own experience. Let us suppose, for example, that you have worked behind a counter during the Christmas season, or that you have been employed on a Great Lakes steamboat during a summer vacation. You should then be admirably qualified to write an expository article explaining the duties of a clerk or a steward, and, since your task would be the writing of an expository article, you would be careful not to stress either the narrative or the descriptive element. To take one further example, let us suppose that at some time you have assisted in the construction of a summer cottage or the creation of an artificial lake. You should then be in an excellent position to explain the process of cottage building or that of dam construction.

Reading—

Most expository subjects, however, cannot be satisfactorily treated without more or less reading on the part of the prospective writer. Anyone who wishes to discuss intelligently a current scientific theory or a current literary trend or a current political development must necessarily turn to books and magazines and newspapers. Even if one were to discuss so local a subject as the government of one's home community, one could not hope to get good results without consulting municipal documents and records.

2 TAKING NOTES

Filing cards—

At the very outset of a project of research the writer should equip himself with a supply of filing cards. Unless one is willing to waste a great deal of paper a notebook will not do, for every note taken should be entered upon a separate slip or card. To enter numerous miscellaneous notes upon a single large sheet would make the researcher's task hopelessly confusing. In the actual writing of notes upon cards a certain amount of latitude is permissible, but the method illustrated below will be as serviceable as any that the writer could adopt.

The New Southern Realism

Quinn, A. H. *American Fiction*
New York, 1936 p. 682

"It was only natural that her [Ellen Glasgow's] method in treating such material should be realistic. The poverty, the hardships of the small farmer, or of the young lawyer, or the widow with children, do not lend themselves to the glamour of romance so easily as does the planter, even in his decay."¹

The illustration above is a sample note for a monograph on *The New South in Fiction*. Many notes, of course, will be much briefer than this. One card, for instance, might simply record the population of Richmond according to the census of 1930. It will be observed that upon each card are listed three items: first, the subject of the note taken, second, the work from which the note is taken, third, the note itself.

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The library catalogues—

The chances are that during your first month in college you were assigned the task of accompanying a group of your classmates on a tour of inspection of the library. If you were, your guide was probably the librarian or one of his assistants, who explained in detail the things that every user of a community library ought to know. Quite possibly you have forgotten much of this information, but you must, at any rate, have been permanently impressed with the fact that no person can use a library to good advantage until he has learned his way about in it. To expect a library attendant to do all of the work of finding books for you is both unintelligent and unreasonable, it is a waste of your own time as well as that of the attendant. As far as possible, then, you will do your own searching. If the library rules permit you to enter the stacks, and if (as is almost certain) your library is catalogued according to the Dewey system, you will know in what section to look for books upon the subject in which you are interested at the moment. You will remember, for example, that all books of and about literature are in the "800" section, and that all books of biography and history are in the "900" section. And even if you are not permitted to enter the stacks, you may always consult the card catalogue. As regards the latter, you will recall that there are three ways of looking up a book—under title, under author's name, and under general subject. You will recall, further, that the entire library catalogue is arranged in a single alphabetical order.

To find American magazine articles published since the beginning of the year 1900 you will consult the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*, and you will use this guide just as you use the card index, that is, you will

look under title, under author's name, or under general subject To find magazine articles published between 1802 and 1900 you will consult Poole's *Index to Periodical Literature* To find daily news items printed during the past quarter of a century you may well consult the *New York Times Index*, even though your library may not be so fortunate as to possess complete files of the *Times*

Works of reference—

In every college library there is at least one room in which every student may browse at will, namely, the reference room Here will be found the dictionaries, the atlases, the directories, the yearbooks, and the encyclopedias, both general and special And here the student *should* browse freely To this room he should return again and again, until he knows precisely the location of every important reference book in his fields of interest

Let us begin with the general encyclopedias There are many such works, but the three most important in the English language are the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the *Encyclopedia Americana*, and the *New International Encyclopedia* All three of these encyclopedias are edited by large staffs of experts, and many of their more important articles are written and signed by recognized specialists The *Britannica*, the largest of the three, contains fuller and more detailed articles than the others, but the *Americana* and the *International* have many short articles on topics not treated by the *Britannica* at all These encyclopedias are extremely valuable, if they are used in the right way On large topics they do not pretend to be exhaustive, and for this reason they are often more helpful for what they suggest than for what they fulfill In many instances, indeed, the bibliography appended to an

encyclopedia article will prove more serviceable to the student than will the article itself

For certain purposes the researcher will do best to turn to specialized encyclopedias rather than to the general ones. For instance, if he wishes to know more about the music of Wagner than he can find in the *Britannica*, he may well refer to Grove's *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. If he wishes a brief but particularly detailed and authoritative biographical sketch of Charles James Fox or some other famous Englishman of the past, he had better go to the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Other important specialized encyclopedias include Bailey's *Cyclopedia of Agriculture*, Baldwin's *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology*, Hastings's *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, McLaughlin and Hart's *Cyclopedia of American Government*, Palgrave's *Dictionary of Political Economy*, and the *Dictionary of American Biography*.

Sometimes the student may wish to obtain biographical data upon some person who has come into prominence too recently to be included in any encyclopedia, either general or special. For such data he will turn to the annual *Who's Who* (British and European) or to the biennial *Who's Who in America*. For information on important developments of national or international interest during the past year he may go not only to the recent periodicals but also to such concise and generally accurate compendia as the *Americana Annual*, the *New International Year Book*, and the *New York World Almanac*.

Reliability of sources—

The researcher gathers his data from two principal kinds of sources, primary and secondary. Primary sources include letters, diaries, deeds, contracts, secretaries' minutes, and other unpublished documents. Secondary

sources include books, periodicals, and all other forms of indirect testimony. For instance, if a London parish register informs me that Anthony Trollope was born April 24, 1815, I have the authority of a primary source. If, on the other hand, Michael Sadlier's biography of Trollope gives me this same information, I have the authority of a secondary source.

Before we leave the subject of primary sources, let us point out that rare unpublished documents are sometimes made accessible to the researcher through photostatic copies. Let us suppose, for example, that the British Museum contains an unpublished letter or manuscript which you would like very much to inspect. Let us suppose, further, that you have neither the time nor the money necessary for a trip to England. All of this does not necessarily mean that the letter or the manuscript is utterly inaccessible to you, or even that you will have to be content with a typewritten copy. At comparatively small cost you can probably obtain a thoroughly legible photographic reproduction. Very few undergraduates will ever have occasion to use photostats, but the fact that they are obtainable should be known to everyone who is at all interested in research.

Since the student will depend principally upon secondary sources, he should constantly ask himself this question: Just how reliable is this source from which I am gathering data? And in attempting to find an answer he should consider particularly three circumstances: the date of the book or article, the competence of the author, and the bias (or lack of bias) of the author.

It is always important to note carefully, both in mind and with pen, the date of every publication that one quotes or cites as authority. It is equally important to realize that the nature of the subject under investigation will

determine whether an old publication may be valuable or whether its age makes it necessarily worthless. If, for example, I were making a study of governmental conditions in Czechoslovakia, I should know that any book or article written even so recently as August, 1938, would be sadly outdated. If, on the other hand, I were studying the rhetorical theories of Aristotle, I might gather some of my most valuable data from a work three hundred years old.

Quite as important as the date of a work is the identity of its author. For this reason, researchers should turn to anonymous writings with great caution if at all. And when the name of an author is known, the researcher should ascertain the principal biographical facts about him, particularly his education, his achievements, and his general intellectual background. Let us take a single example. In the library I find a *Life of William Shakespeare*, by Sir Sidney Lee. Upon looking up the biographical data on Lee, I find that that distinguished English scholar and writer lived from 1859 to 1926, that he received his formal education at Balliol College, Oxford, that he specialized in the literature and the history of the sixteenth century, that he devoted many years to the close study of Shakespearean documents, that he was invited to prepare the article on Shakespeare for the *Dictionary of National Biography*, and that he was entrusted with the extremely exacting task of editing the Oxford facsimile of the First Folio edition of Shakespeare's plays. I am now convinced that Sir Sidney Lee was eminently competent to write authoritatively about the life and works of William Shakespeare.

Along with an author's knowledge of his subject should be considered his bias or his disinterestedness. Although it is very true that the more scholarly an author is, the

more judicial he is likely to be, it is also true that the researcher must be constantly on his guard to avoid mistaking prejudices for indisputable facts. Sometimes the very circumstances under which a book was written will go a long way toward answering the question, Was the author a dispassionate judge, or was he an impassioned advocate or prosecutor? In this connection, it must be perfectly clear to any discriminating student that if one wishes to get an honest portrait of the late Calvin Coolidge, one is much more likely to find it in William Allen White's *Puritan in Babylon* (1938) than in a 1924 campaign biography of Coolidge. It must be equally clear that an article appearing in a given periodical will probably be colored by the known bias of that periodical. For instance, almost any political article in the *Nation* or the *New Republic* will be more friendly to the Socialism of Norman Thomas than to the Republicanism of Herbert Hoover or the Democracy of Carter Glass. Almost any political article in the *Saturday Evening Post* or the *New York Herald Tribune* would be in direct opposition to the viewpoint of the *Nation* or the *New Republic*. Consequently, when a student goes notetaking he must do so with mental reservations, he must select and sort and sift his authorities with the utmost caution.

Bibliography—

Appended to every research paper will be found a working bibliography, that is, a list of all books and articles that have been quoted or cited by the author of the paper. Although usually placed at the end of the paper, the bibliography will have been compiled before a word of the text has been written, for all of the information that goes into a working bibliography is gathered during the process of notetaking. Each book title listed in a bibli-

ography should be accompanied by the name of the author, the name of the publishing firm, the name of the city in which the book was published, and the year of publication. If the name of the author is unknown, the bibliographical listing of that particular book should begin with the title. If (as happens rarely, but occasionally) the year of publication cannot be ascertained, the listing should end with the abbreviation *nd*. A good example of a satisfactory bibliographical listing is as follows:

Quinn, Arthur Hobson *American Fiction* D Appleton Century Co New York, 1936

A magazine article may be listed as follows:

Moffat, David 'War and Football' *Atlantic Monthly*, Vol CLXI (Jan., 1938)

The listings just given are suggested rather than mandatory forms. Unless you so desire, you do not have to follow them precisely in every detail. A careful study of numerous bibliographies will show you that in actual practice there is a certain amount of latitude. You will notice, however, that every competent researcher follows some one practice with absolute consistency. The advantage of beginning a bibliographical listing with an author's name, and of placing that author's surname first, is that this method lends itself conveniently to the alphabetical arrangement of listings.

Footnotes—

Every quoted or cited passage in a research paper should be accompanied by a footnote. Footnotes should be numbered rather than marked with the asterisk (*) or the dagger (†), since there will often be more than one or two footnotes to a page. The figure designating the

number of the note should immediately follow the quoted or cited passage in the text, but it should precede the footnote in the lower margin. Footnotes may be numbered consecutively through a single page, through a chapter or an article, or through an entire book. Again, however, the student needs to be reminded that whichever of these three methods is adopted, it should be followed throughout with strict consistency.

A complete footnote listing differs from a bibliographical listing in two particulars: first, in a footnote it is not necessary to mention the name of the publishing firm, second, in a footnote it is imperative to indicate the page from which the quotation or citation was taken. A good example of a complete footnote is as follows:

A. H. Quinn, *American Fiction*, p. 229. New York, 1936.

If the same work is quoted or cited more than once in an article or a book, only the first footnote on that work needs to be complete. Subsequent footnotes may be given as follows:

Quinn, *op cit*, p. 193

Quinn, *op cit*, p. 87

3 OUTLINING

Every competent writer considers an outline an indispensable preliminary to a clear, coherent, unified, well-proportioned composition. In fact, to write a composition without having first prepared an outline is like attempting to build a house without the guidance of blueprints. There are three kinds of outlines: the topical, the sentence, and the paragraph. A topical outline is one in which each of the items is expressed in the form of a phrase. It has the advantage of conciseness, but it

lacks the completeness of a sentence outline, and for that reason it is seldom as satisfactory for a long, elaborate composition. A sentence outline is one in which each item is expressed in the form of a complete sentence, and in which the relations between its items are, as a rule, explicitly stated. The sentence outline is the type generally preferred by professional writers. A paragraph outline is really a much condensed composition. It consists of a series of very short paragraphs, each of which expresses concisely the gist of a paragraph that is to be considerably amplified in the completed composition. In order to make a satisfactory outline, a writer must, of course, determine carefully just which are to be his main topics and which are to be his subordinate topics. He must also determine the most suitable arrangement of topics. The inexperienced writer will gain much valuable practice by outlining articles and chapters from magazines and books that he reads, as well as by studying tables of contents. In general, however, the most practical outlines are writers' rather than readers' outlines, for only a writer's outline is serviceable in a creative way.

Phraseology in outlines—

Items in an outline should be expressed in uniform phraseology. It is inconsistent and illogical to make an outline that is partly topical and partly sentence.

Symbols in outlines—

All items of a given rank should be preceded by symbols of the same kind. For instance, if a Roman numeral precedes the first main topic, other Roman numerals should precede all succeeding main topics. A good procedure is to use Roman numerals (I, II, III) for topics of the first rank, capital letters (A, B, C) for topics of the

second rank, Arabic figures (1, 2, 3) for topics of the third rank, and lower-case letters (a, b, c) for topics (if there are any) of the fourth rank. Other systems of symbols are permissible, but whatever system is adopted should be followed with absolute consistency.

Indentation in outlines—

All items of a given rank should begin at the same marginal line. Items of the first rank should begin farthest to the left. In other words, items should be indented in inverse proportion to their importance.

Pairing of items—

There should be at least two items of each rank. It is considered illogical to have an Item I without a companion Item II, an Item A without a companion Item B, an Item 1 without a companion Item 2, and so forth. Usage says that this rule does not apply rigidly in the briefing of formal arguments, but in the outlining of literary compositions the rule is to be regarded as inflexible.

Specimen outlines—

The three outlines below will serve to illustrate the three types named and defined above. The student should inspect them minutely, observing with great care the phraseology, the symbols, the indentions, and the punctuation, as well as the content and the arrangement of each outline.

CAMBRIDGE AS AN INDUSTRIAL CENTER

(A Topical Outline)

Introduction Average intelligent person's conception of Cambridge, Massachusetts

- I Importance of Cambridge as an industrial center
 - A Cambridge the third greatest industrial city in Massachusetts
 - B Cambridge a relatively important industrial center nationally
- II Reasons for growth of industry in Cambridge
 - A Demand for books in an educational center
 - B Opening of subway to Boston
 - C Increased use of motor trucks
- III Types of industry in Cambridge
 - A Printing and publishing traditional
 - B Candy in demand among students
 - C Soap in demand among the fastidious

CAMBRIDGE AS AN INDUSTRIAL CENTER

(A Sentence Outline)

Introduction The average intelligent person thinks of Cambridge, Massachusetts, as almost exclusively a great cultural center

- A He has always heard of Cambridge as the seat of Harvard University
 - B When he visits Cambridge, his sight seeing is confined largely to the Harvard Yard, the Craigie House, Elmwood, and the old Congregational and Unitarian churches
- I Cambridge is an important industrial center
 - A It is the third greatest industrial city in Massachusetts
 - 1 Its manufactured output exceeds that of every other Massachusetts city except Boston and Worcester
 - 2 Its manufactured products exceed in value those of several larger Massachusetts cities, including Springfield and Fall River

- B It is relatively important as a national industrial center
 - 1 It exceeds Syracuse, New York, a better known industrial center
 - 2 It exceeds Columbus, Ohio, a much larger city and commercial center
- II Cambridge has developed industrially for several reasons
 - A As home of our oldest and most famous university, it has always been a logical center for printing and publishing
 - 1 Its first printing press, set up in 1639, was the earliest in this country
 - 2 For three hundred years it has maintained the printing industry continuously
 - B The opening of the subway in 1912 made Cambridge only three minutes distant from Boston
 - 1 Since then small manufactured articles can be shipped by express as quickly from Cambridge as from any industrial area of Boston proper
 - 2 The subway has opened the large consumer area of Boston itself to Cambridge manufacturers
 - C The increased use of motor trucks has further accelerated the industrial development of Cambridge
 - 1 Trucks from Cambridge factories do not have to pass through heavy Boston traffic *en route* to Boston wharves and freight stations
 - 2 Cambridge factories are readily accessible by truck to the Boston consumer market
- III Cambridge has naturally developed certain types of industry
 - A Its printing and publishing industry has followed and fostered its famed intellectual traditions
 - B Its candy industry appeals especially to a community of its peculiar type
 - 1 Well-to-do young people are the greatest consumers of candy

- 2 Harvard, Radcliffe, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and other colleges give Cambridge more than her share of well-to do young people
- C Its soap industry appeals to an exceptionally fastidious community
 - 1 Its college students, as a class, are fastidious
 - 2 Its college professors, as a class, are fastidious

CAMBRIDGE AS AN INDUSTRIAL CENTER

(A Paragraph Outline)

Introduction The average intelligent person naturally thinks of Cambridge, Massachusetts, as almost exclusively a great cultural center. From early childhood he has heard of Cambridge as the seat of Harvard University, and when he visits Cambridge, his sight-seeing is confined largely to the Harvard Yard, the Craigie House, Elmwood, and the Congregational and Unitarian churches.

- I Cambridge is, however, an important industrial center, as well as a famous seat of learning and culture. It is, in fact, the third industrial city in Massachusetts, its manufactured output exceeding that of every other Massachusetts city except Boston and Worcester, and including, therefore, that of such larger Massachusetts cities as Springfield and Fall River. Cambridge is, moreover, a relatively important industrial center nationally. Its manufactured output exceeds that of certain larger cities and better-known industrial centers in other parts of the country, such as Syracuse, New York, and Columbus, Ohio.
- II Cambridge has developed industrially for several reasons. In the first place, as the home of our oldest university, it has always been a logical center for printing and publishing, an industry which it has maintained continuously since America's first printing-press was set up in Cambridge in 1639. In the second place, the opening

of the subway in 1912 made Cambridge only three minutes distant from Boston. As a result, small manufactured articles can be shipped very quickly by express from Cambridge, both to distant points and to the large consumers' area of Boston itself. In the third place, the increased use of motor trucks has further accelerated the industrial development of Cambridge, for Cambridge trucks, avoiding heavy Boston traffic, can pass speedily to Boston wharves and freight stations, as well as to Boston consumers' markets.

- III Cambridge has naturally developed certain types of industry. Its printing and publishing industry has followed and fostered its famed intellectual traditions. Its candy industry appeals especially to a community of its peculiar type—a community which, with its Harvard, Radcliffe, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and other college students, has more than her share of well-to-do young people. Its soap industry appeals to an exceptionally fastidious community, and its college students and college professors are, as a class, fastidious.

EXERCISES

I Criticize the following brace of paragraphs from the standpoints of unity and coherence. Rewrite the entire passage.

Literary history has already given the late John Galsworthy a secure place among twentieth century English novelists. He was aristocratic in background, but liberal in outlook. He was peculiarly well equipped to portray all classes of Englishmen keenly, yet sympathetically. In most of his novels he shows both the tragedy and the comedy of English class distinctions. He is less incisive in wit than Thackeray and less rich in humor than Dickens. He surpasses both of the great Victorian novelists in objectivity and detachment. He seldom becomes ironic, like Thackeray, or angry, like Dickens. He sees life steadily and sees it whole. His greatest novel is

The Forsyte Saga, but *A Human Comedy*, *Fraternity*, and *The Patrician* are notable. He compares favorably with his major English contemporaries. He may not be so vigorous in thought as H. G. Wells or so vivid in pictorial effects as Arnold Bennett. He surpasses both Wells and Bennett in style, structure, and general artistry. Galsworthy must also be given a high place among recent English dramatists. He wrote nearly thirty plays, most of them dealing with the different English social classes, their conflicts, and their problems. His plays are structurally sound and dramatically strong. His characters are well drawn and well differentiated. His dialogue is lifelike. Among his most notable plays are *The Silver Box*, *Justice*, *The Pigeon*, *Loyalties*, and *Old English*.

Probably his best known play, if not his greatest, is *Strife*. This is a remarkably impartial study of the struggle between capital and labor. When the curtain falls on the last act, we are equally sympathetic to John Anthony, the millionaire manufacturer, and David Roberts, the leader of the striking workmen. Edgar Anthony, Enid Underwood, and Simon Harness are other well-portrayed characters in this powerful drama. Edgar and Enid are John Anthony's grown children. Harness is a labor leader. *Strife* and most of Galsworthy's other dramas are as skilful in technique as the best plays of Sir Arthur Pinero and Henry Arthur Jones. Galsworthy is less artificial, less obviously mechanical, than Pinero or Jones.

II Prepare outlines for themes on two or three of the expository subjects suggested in this book (see pages 15, 42, 49). Experiment with all three types of outline.

4 WRITING THE PAPER

Originality, a writer's moral obligation—

One of the ugliest, most condemnatory words in the dictionary is the word *plagiarism*, for plagiarism, or literary theft, is the stealing of another writer's ideas or phraseology and palming it off as one's own. Every student

should be made to realize that plagiarism is just as unethical as is cheating in an examination. He should constantly bear in mind that he has no right to borrow from another author without giving due credit. This is the minimum requirement of an honest research paper.

The maximum requirement goes much further than that. It presupposes that a research paper is not worth writing unless the researcher has an original objective or thesis to present, and an original objective or thesis presupposes an original plan of organization. A good research paper, then, is neither a repetition nor a digest of another writer's article; it is the researcher's own creative work. Quotations and citations may legitimately be frequent, but the researcher's own criticisms and interpretations should be made to stand out much more prominently than his borrowings. In this connection, it should be remarked that one of the worst things that a research writer can possibly do is to quote a long passage that he does not feel competent to interpret.

A good research paper is like a good chair. The wood, the varnish, the glue, the screws, the springs, the padding, and the tapestry come from various sources, but the design and the workmanship of the finished product are the chair-maker's own. And, incidentally, the finished product looks nothing at all like any one of the several different materials that enter into its make-up.

An excellent example of the original research paper is afforded by David Lee Clark's monograph "Shelley and Shakespeare," a much abridged text of which will be found at the end of this chapter. Taking as his objective the thesis that Shelley was deeply indebted to Shakespeare, Professor Clark assembles and presents old materials in an entirely new way and from an absolutely fresh point of view. From his consultation of the most authoritative

biographies, the poet's letters and *Journal*, and the text of the poet's published writings, Professor Clark is able to offer abundant specific evidence of Shelley's avid reading of Shakespeare, Shelley's enthusiastic remarks about Shakespeare, Shelley's quotations and citations from Shakespeare, and Shelley's imitations of Shakespeare, both in phraseology and in dramatic technique

The genuine research paper is, then, much more than a trite rehash of the efforts and accomplishments of others. It is, indeed—to return to a figure used above—an entirely new piece of furniture.

EXERCISES

1 Consult the library catalogue and the *Reader's Guide* to see what material you can find on some subject in which you happen to be especially interested.

2 See what important biographical information you can find about the following: Viscount Halifax, Thomas E. Dewey, Cordell Hull, Maxwell Anderson, John Steinbeck, H. V. Kaltenborn, Pearl Buck, Karl T. Compton, Mildred Helen McAfee, Robert M. Hutchins, William Green, Katharine Cornell, Herbert H. Lehman, Bruce Barton, Henry A. Wallace, Wendell Willkie, Winston Spencer Churchill.

3 Look up important developments in aviation during the year 1939. In television. In chemistry. In medicine and surgery. In painting. In the drama and the motion picture. In flood prevention.

4 If you were to write a new biography of John C. Calhoun, what would be your most important secondary sources? In the same connection, consider a few of the following: Henry Adams, James G. Blaine, Henry Clay, David G. Farragut, Samuel F. B. Morse, Benjamin Disraeli, Charles Lamb, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Heinrich Heine, Louis Pasteur.

5 Prepare a working bibliography for a potential research paper. Choose some subject that really interests you, whether that subject be literature, history, politics, economics, sociol-

ogy, art, science, or any other important human activity. Your instructor in your favorite course of study can probably give you some very helpful suggestions. As far as possible, however, work upon your own initiative. Your intellectual curiosity should be your strongest incentive.

6 Perhaps your English instructor would like to have you write a 3000 word research paper as your long theme for the semester. If so, first follow out the suggestion made in Exercise 5, taking careful and copious notes. When you are ready to assemble and organize your materials, prepare a thorough sentence outline. As you prepare the actual text of your paper, follow a correct and consistent procedure with regard to quotations, citations, and footnotes.

7 Study the method and the style of the illustrative selection below. Note with especial care the content of the first, the second, and the last paragraph in the selection. Note the intervening paragraphs as detailed elaborations of the second paragraph.

ILLUSTRATIVE SELECTION

SHELLEY AND SHAKESPEARE

The purpose of this paper is to point out the extent of Shelley's knowledge of Shakespeare and his indebtedness to him. Students of Shelley have merely assumed that both were considerable, but, so far as I know, this is the first systematic statement of the facts.

There are four primary sources of information about Shelley's reading: (1) his contemporary biographers, (2) his letters, (3) references in his prose and poetry, (4) the *Journal*. These will now be examined.

Contemporary biographers—Four of Shelley's intimate friends, turning biographers, bear witness to the poet's deep and sympathetic knowledge of Shakespeare. Medwin tells us that Shelley was a constant reader of Shakespeare, and that, by this reading, he hoped to invigorate his own style, Hogg

says that Shelley read widely in Shakespeare, Trelawny observes that Shelley tried to improve his style by imitating Shakespeare, and Peacock, a trustworthy witness, asserts that the poet read aloud to him "almost all of Shakespeare's tragedies and some of his more poetical comedies," and studied Shakespeare "with unwearied devotion"

Letters—Shakespeare is quoted, paraphrased, or referred to twenty one times in the *Letters* *Macbeth*, *The Tempest*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *All's Well*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Lear*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and *Julius Caesar* are specifically mentioned Shelley invariably refers to Shakespeare with reverence and quotes him to express his own inarticulate thoughts or to give backbone to an argument In one letter to his publishers Shelley orders the Complete Works of Shakespeare, in another, he discusses the authorship of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, contending that Shakespeare was not the author In other letters he remarks Shakespeare's depth of thought, his sensibility, his restraint, his wisdom, his penetrating insight into human character, and his almost super-human power over words

References in his prose and poetry—Shelley quotes, paraphrases, or refers to Shakespeare thirty-seven times in twenty-six different productions Canto II of *The Wandering Jew* (1810) is headed by a quotation from *Hamlet*, beginning "I could a tale unfold," and Canto IV, with one from *Macbeth*, 'What are ye So wither'd and so wild?' In the same year, in *Zastrozzi*, chapters IX and XV have as headpieces quotations from *Macbeth* "Art thou afeard To be the same in thine own act As thou art in desire?" and "That no compunctious visitings of nature shake my fell purpose" In *Proposals for an Association of those Philanthropists* (1812) Shelley again uses his favorite lines from *Macbeth*, "Letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would' Like the poor cat 'n the adage" In the same year, in his *Letter to Lord Ellenborough*, the same quotation is employed with telling effect His *Speech at Dublin* (1812) contains unmistakable references to the Dogberry-Verges Watch episode in *Much Ado* To brace up his belief

in the immateriality of the universe, Shelley, in his *Essay on Life*, quotes a passage from *The Tempest*

The Journal—The most detailed and accurate account of Shelley's reading and general intellectual activity is the *Journal*, kept by Shelley and Mary, jointly, from July 28, 1814, till his death on July 8, 1822. The entries are for the most part by Mary. Here is what the *Journal* says of Shelley's reading of Shakespeare on August 28, 1816, is recorded, simply, "read Shakespeare," September 4, "read Shakespeare." The next entry is December 1, "read Political Justice, Shakespeare, and 23 chapters of Gibbon." On April 4, 1817, "read *Macbeth*," finishing it on the 23. On December 13, he read *Much Ado* aloud to Mary, finishing it the following day. Mary, in her summary of the reading for 1817, mentions the fact that Shelley also read *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Othello*. During the year 1818, Shelley read the following from Shakespeare: *Hamlet*, April 29, *Richard III*, August 6 and 7, finishing it aloud to Mary the following day, *Henry VIII*, August 10, finishing it aloud to Mary on the eleventh, on his way to Venice, August 17, Shelley read *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, which we have seen he did not believe was Shakespeare's, *Cymbeline*, October 5 and 6, aloud to Mary. The reading for 1819 was much curtailed by Shelley's illness and by the fact that his well moments were spent in composition. The *Journal* records, "read Shakespeare," April 21. During 1820, he read *The Tempest*, January 12, finishing it the following day, *King John*, and Part I of *Henry IV*, aloud to Mary. January 21, *Henry V*, March 2, *Henry IV*, March 6, aloud. For 1821, the *Journal* records simply, "begins *King Lear*," February 20.


The foregoing is a full account of Shelley's knowledge of Shakespeare and his indebtedness to him. It is clearly estab-

lished that Shelley had a deep and sympathetic understanding of Shakespeare. And the sixty-six passages from the poems of Shelley herein cited as containing parallels in thought, phrase, imagery, or symbolism to passages in the plays of Shakespeare—and here brought together for the first time—show the extent and the nature of Shelley's indebtedness. This study very clearly indicates that Shakespeare's influence on Shelley's thought and style was more significant than has usually been allowed. He borrowed freely from Shakespeare's imagery: note especially the images of the hunter and the wounded deer, life as a stage, thoughts as pursuing hounds, the chill stream and the timid swimmer, time as casting shadows, the dogs of war—all of these directly from Shakespeare. The abstract nature of Shelley's images derives in part from Shakespeare. Furthermore, Shelley found in Shakespeare what he thought was a confirmation of his own radicalism, and learned from his great good sense in art not to overstep the modesty of nature.²

—David Lee Clark "Shelley and Shakespeare"

² *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, March, 1939. Reprinted by permission.

The Popularizing Article

 THERE ARE TWO WAYS IN which a very well informed person may impart to others some of his rich store of information. One way is technical, the other way is popular. For instance, an expert in the field of chemistry may prepare two very different lectures upon the same general subject. One of these lectures will be highly technical and abstruse, for it is to be delivered before a group of specialists, the members of the American Chemical Society. The other of these lectures will be couched in an interesting and easily comprehensible style, for it is to be delivered before an audience of laymen, a general popular audience. Similarly, a specialist in the field of Victorian poetry might write two papers on Browning, one of them a monograph (research paper) for a professional journal, the other a literary essay (popularizing article) for a popular magazine.

Let us now compare and contrast the popularizing article with the research paper. (And, in this connection, let the student understand that throughout this chapter we are using the word *essay* as a synonym for the phrase *popularizing article*, and that we are using the word *mono-*

graph as a synonym for the word *dissertation* or the phrase *research paper*) The essay and the monograph differ especially in three particulars scope, purpose, and style

1 SCOPE

When we say that the essay differs from the monograph in scope, we do not, of course, imply that it is impossible to write a good essay and a good monograph upon the same general subject. What we do imply is that an essay of any given length is likely to be much broader in scope than the monograph of about the same length. In other words, where the essayist can afford to be discursive and rather general, the monographist feels bound to be intensive and detailed. For example, Emerson's popular essay on Shakespeare doubtless serves its purpose as adequately as any of the learned dissertations of Professor Nikolaus Delius serve theirs, but the field of the former is much less restricted than that of the latter. In the space of some twenty pages the New England philosopher says all that he has to say about the life and the work of the bard of Avon, in a considerably longer space the German professor discusses Shakespeare's meters alone.

2 PURPOSE

In purpose, also, the essay is totally different from the scholarly dissertation. As is pointed out in our chapter on the familiar essay, the office of the essayist is not to prove. To quote the words of Orlo Williams, the essay "should set out to prove nothing, but may illuminate anything." Some day an Oxford master of arts or a Harvard doctor of philosophy may demonstrate by documentary evidence that Geoffrey Chaucer was born in 1340, but until that day arrives no reputable monographist will have the temerity to declare that this was certainly the year of

Chaucer's birth The essayist, however, is frequently and unblushingly dogmatic "In an enlightened age," insists Macaulay in his essay on Milton, "there will be but little poetry" "Taste," announces Ruskin in the second essay of *The Crown of Wild Olive*, "is the only morality" "The Italians," avers Matthew Arnold in *Equality*, "are pre eminent in feeling the power of beauty" Could any of these dicta be demonstrated by the scientific or by the historical method? Certainly not But all of them can be so illuminatingly and so convincingly amplified and re enforced that the sympathetic reader will come to regard their truth as highly probable And that is all that is demanded or expected of the essayist To indicate further the purposive distinction between the essay and the monograph, let us say that the essayist is primarily a creative artist, the monographist, essentially a critical expert The essayist arrives at opinions through meditation, the monographist, at definite conclusions through tangible evidence The essayist addresses himself to the cultivated reading public as a whole, the monographist, to a limited group of professionals

Obviously, then, the writer of the essay employs a style that is strikingly different from that used by the writer of the monograph

3 STYLE

To make the most superficial distinction, the carefully referenced footnotes of the monograph would be unnecessary in the essay Hazlitt, one of the greatest English essayists, did most of his quoting from memory and with a fluent inaccuracy that would be utterly intolerable in the monograph Such carelessness is, of course, an extreme case Quoting—or misquoting—from memory is rare among essayists, and it is certainly not be commended

to the amateur But no essayist need feel under any obligation to cite page and edition references for the authorities that he quotes In fact, such meticulousness would be quite out of keeping with the spirit and tone of the true essay

And there are, of course, much more substantial differences of style between the monograph and the essay The ideal monograph style is clear, competent, and respectable The ideal essay style is all of this and more, it is distinctive, brilliant, allusive, and, in the best sense, ornate "The true essayist," says Orlo Williams, "handles his subject like an artist and not like a professor He takes up some pretty crystal of thought, not, as a chemist, to enlarge upon its composition and its relation to other chemical bodies, but rather as some cunning master-jeweler, lovingly polishing each facet, making it glint in the light, and setting it quaintly in some device of his own that it may attract the lovers of beautiful things and live long in their possession"¹

To appreciate more fully the stylistic difference between the monograph and the essay, let us examine a passage from a typical monograph, and then a passage from a representative essay The following from Professor Killis Campbell's dissertation on *Lowell's Uncollected Poems* will give an insight into the monograph style

If we inquire as to the motives that led the poet to sacrifice so large a number of his poems, we conclude, first of all, that a good many of the early pieces went by the board because of their sheer immaturity This will explain the omission of his juvenilia in *Harvardiana* and his "Class Poem" (a long-winded and scattering and declamatory performance) Immaturity likewise, displaying itself either in crudeness of

¹ Orlo Williams *The Essay* Copyright Geo H Doran Co

art or in feebleness of thought, or in both, serves to explain the omission of most of the poems in the volume of 1841,—in particular, the majority of the thirty three sonnets that lie buried in that volume and of the ten sonnets that last saw the light in the volume of 1844. And diffuseness and an imperfect focus will sufficiently account for the discarding of most of the rejected longer poems of the early forties. Some of the pieces of this period were doubtless omitted because of their imitativeness,—though Lowell, I think, overstated the case against himself when he declared in 1843 in a letter to Poe, May 8, that the volume of 1841 “contained more of everybody else than of himself.” Keats and Wordsworth and Tennyson appear to me to have been his chief early models, but there were also verses, as “The Sphinx” and “Out of Doors,” that are pretty clearly modeled after Emerson, “A Reverie” plainly affects the manner and the diction of Tennyson, and several of the early poems—including “Rosaline” (which was retained only after being shorn of most of its Gothic elements) and the discarded “Ballad” (Gloomily the river floweth)—seem to me to have been patterned after Poe.² The above passage leaves nothing to be desired, so far as the requirements of monograph style are concerned. It says precisely what it intends to say, and in an entirely competent manner. But it does not aspire either to distinctiveness or to eloquence, it makes no pretensions to individuality, it is essentially identical in diction and phraseology with what Professor Trent, Professor Quinn, Professor Cairns, Professor Boynton, Professor Pattee, or any other authority on American literature might have written upon the same subject. Moreover, it is characterized by a cautious reservation of utterance, a careful citation of dates, which, though commendable and indeed imperative in the monograph, would be positively emasculating to any essay.

² *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, XXXVIII, pp 934-5 Dec., 1923. Reprinted by permission.

Now let us examine the opening paragraph of Professor George E Woodberry's essay on Wordsworth

We approach our own times, and if, hitherto, literature has seemed to us a somewhat far-off thing, a thing of the Greek Myth, of chivalric allegory, of the Renaissance hero, it should now grow near and fast to us as our chief present aid in leading that large race life of the mind whose end, as I have said, is to free the individual soul. The notion that poetry is a thing remote from life is a singular delusion, it is more truly to be described as the highways of our days, though we tread it, as children tread the path of innocence, without knowing it. Nothing is more constant in the life of boy or man than the outgoing of his soul into the world about him, and this outgoing, however it be achieved, is the act of poetry. It is in the realm of nature that these journeys first take place, nature is a medium by which the soul passes out into a larger existence, and as nature is very close to all men, perhaps our experience with her offers the most universal, certainly it offers the most elementary, illustration of the poetical life which all men, in some measure, lead. Wordsworth is, preeminently, a guide in this region, and, as he was less indebted than poets usually are to the great tradition of literature in past ages, poetry in him seems more exclusively a thing of the present life, contemporary and altogether our own. Such a poet, endeavoring by a conscious reform to renew poetry in his age and bring it home to man's bosom, eliminating the conventional ways, images, and language even of the poetic past, is necessarily thrown back on nature, in the external world, and on character, in the internal world, for his subject matter, history, except in contemporary forms, will be far from him, and of myth and chivalry, of Plato and the Italians, though he will have his share, he will have the least possible. This may leave his verse bare and monotonous in quality, but what substance it does contain will have great vitality, for it comes directly from the man. You will observe, however, that his narrower

scope of learning, treatment, and theme makes no difference in the essential point of difference. His longest and most deliberate poem—the one into which he tried to empty his entire mind, —“The Prelude,” is the history of the formation of his mind, he says, that is, plainly, his subject is the same as Spenser’s—how in our days is a human soul brought to its fullness of power and grace? The manner, the story, the accessories, the entire color and atmosphere, are changed from what they were in the Elizabethan times, but the question abides. Spenser is hardly aware that nature has anything to do with forming the soul, to Wordsworth, nature seems its chief nourishment and fosterer, almost its creator. I desire to illustrate how Wordsworth represented the outgoing of the soul in nature, as a part of its discipline, its education in life, like the quest of the Knights in Spenser.³

—George E. Woodberry *The Torch*

As may be readily seen, Professor Woodberry’s paragraph has little in common with the passage quoted from Professor Campbell, except that each deals with the work of an eminent modern poet. That the two passages belong in entirely different types of composition there can be no doubt. Professor Woodberry’s essay style is, of course, as clear and competent as Professor Campbell’s monograph style, and so it should be, but freedom from obscurity and from mechanical faultiness are only negative virtues in the essay. Professor Woodberry’s style is so much a part of himself that this paragraph from *Wordsworth* could hardly have been written by any other essayist. His graceful, melodious sentences glow with allusion and metaphor. He deals with large truths and beautiful suggestions rather than with verified or verifiable facts. He gives no documentary citations, for it is neither necessary nor appropriate for him to do so. His manner of

³ Copyright, 1920 Harcourt Brace & Company Reprinted by permission

expression shows no restraint, except the restraint habitually exercised by a gentleman of cultivated taste

4 PREPARING TO WRITE THE ESSAY

Up to the present paragraph of this chapter, we have attempted to explain what an essay is, but we have not yet advised the amateur how to write one. This type of creative literature, to a far greater extent than any other type, is the product of intensive, appreciative, retentive reading. The young writer who aspires to success as an essayist must fill himself with his subject, and to do so he must commune repeatedly with great minds through the medium of the printed page. He must read innumerable essays, not with a view to conscious imitation, but rather that he may imbibe the spirit of the masters.

Literature is perhaps his most promising field of direct inspiration, but there are other fields, notably art, history, politics, economics, sociology, education, philosophy, and theology, which are excellent. Even science offers genuine allurements to the creative essayist, as has been repeatedly demonstrated by such writers as Vernon Kellogg and Edwin E. Slosson. In fact, it is the testimony of humanistic men of science that one of the increasing needs of the day is scientifically trained persons of cultivated literary taste and with a bent for creative writing. In this connection, the one thing for the amateur to remember is that unless he be gifted with the versatility of a Theodore Roosevelt he must follow the example of the Victorian masters and their most illustrious successors: confine himself to one or two fields of interest.

As a preliminary, then, to writing an essay, the writer should first choose a subject in which he is genuinely interested, and about which he has sufficient knowledge to enable him to write intelligently and informatively.

Having chosen such a subject, and having gathered his material, he should next prepare an outline of some sort—preferably a topical or a sentence outline similar to the outlines on pages 66–69

He will now be ready to begin the actual writing of his article, and from this point on, he must rely upon his inspiration as well as upon his knowledge. As he proceeds, he must constantly bear in mind the purpose of a popularizing article—to inform and interest a large group of readers who are not specialists in the field that the writer has chosen. Let us suppose, for instance, that you are a musician, a member of the college orchestra, and that you decide to write an essay upon the orchestra or upon the orchestral function of the instrument that you play. Could you express yourself in such a manner that the layman, the general reader, will clearly understand and thoroughly enjoy your writing? Certainly you could not do so if you were unduly technical, you would have to use words comprehensible to intelligent persons who are not musicians. Or let us suppose that a New York sports writer prepares an article on baseball for a British magazine, or that a professor of philosophy expounds Plato to a group of business men or club women. Manifestly, the writer or the speaker who wishes to popularize his special field of knowledge must know his audience and must use the language of that audience. Manifestly, too, he can and must do all this without stultification, without insulting the intelligence of his readers or his audience, without sacrificing his own dignity or accuracy.

EXERCISES

1 Learn what you can about the life and the essays of each of the following: Christopher North (John Wilson), Thomas Carlyle, Thomas B. Macaulay, John Henry Newman, John

Ruskin, Herbert Spencer, Matthew Arnold, Thomas Henry Huxley, Walter Pater, Walter Bagehot, Algernon Charles Swinburne, Richard Jefferies, George Saintsbury, Sir Edmund Gosse, Sir Arthur Quiller Couch, Augustine Birrell, Walter Raleigh, William R Inge, L P Jacks, G Lowes Dickinson, and J Arthur Thomson

2 Learn what you can about the life and the essays of each of the following George E Woodberry, Brander Matthews, Bliss Perry, Stuart P Sherman, Henry Seidel Canby, H L Mencken, Walter Lippmann, William Lyon Phelps, Vernon Kellogg, Edwin E Slosson, Will Durant, Elmer Davis, Irwin Edman, and Deems Taylor

3 Select from professional or specialized educational or technical journals at least half a dozen short monographs, and compare them with a like number of informative essays in popular magazines

4 Study the illustrative selections appended to this chapter Wherein do you find the professionally written paragraphs more satisfactory than the student themes? Point out specific weaknesses in the themes

ILLUSTRATIVE SELECTIONS

THE POETRY OF CHAUCER

If we ask ourselves wherein consists the immense superiority of Chaucer's poetry over the romance poetry—why it is that in passing from this to Chaucer we suddenly find ourselves to be in another world, we shall find that this superiority is both in the substance of his poetry and in the style of his poetry His superiority in substance is given by his large, free, simple, clear yet kindly view of human life—so unlike the total want, in the romance poets, of all intelligent command of it Chaucer has not their helplessness, he has gained the power to survey the world from a central, a truly human point of view We have only to call to mind the Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales* The right comment upon it is Dryden's

"It is sufficient to say, according to the proverb, that *here is God's plenty*" And again "He is a perpetual fountain of good sense" It is by a large, free, sound representation of things, that poetry, this high criticism of life, has truth of substance, and Chaucer's poetry has truth of substance ⁴

—Matthew Arnold "The Study of Poetry" *Essays in Criticism*, second series

THE IRRELIGION OF THE MASSES

The irreligion of the masses is a new, strange, and ominous phenomenon For the first time in history the masses are not superstitious, and seem indifferent to the higher claims and consolations of religion Wherever the poisonous influence of Karl Marx and his followers has penetrated, the proletariat is bitterly antichristian and antireligious In England, and probably in America, the average workingman has a sincere reverence for Christ, combined with complete alienation from the Churches It is a religion without dogma, without church, and without eschatology The only virtues which are highly valued are kindness and courage, though temperance and chastity are inculcated, and the moral life is presented as loyalty to Jesus Christ The Gospel is wholly secularized, the future hope which alone evokes enthusiasm is the hope of "a good time coming" for their own class ⁵

—W R Inge "Religion in the Future"

THE PRESTIGE OF WEALTH

To be distinguished from the common herd—to be somebody—to make a name, a position—this is the universal ambition, and to accumulate riches is alike the surest and the easiest way of fulfilling this ambition Very early in life all learn this At school, the court paid to one whose parents have called in their carriage to see him, is conspicuous, while the poor boy, whose insufficient stock of clothes implies the

⁴ Copyright 1888, The Macmillan Company Reprinted by permission

⁵ *Atlantic Monthly*, February, 1925 Reprinted by permission

small means of his family, soon has burnt into his memory the fact that poverty is contemptible. On entering the world, the lessons that may have been taught about the nobility of self-sacrifice, the reverence due to genius, the admirableness of high integrity, are quickly neutralized by experience men's actions proving that these are not their standards of respect. It is soon perceived that while abundant outward marks of deference from fellow citizens may almost certainly be gained by directing every energy to the accumulation of property, they are but rarely to be gained in any other way, and that even in the few cases where they are otherwise gained, they are not given with entire unreserve, but are commonly joined with a more or less manifest display of patronage. When, seeing this, the young man further sees that while the acquisition of property is quite possible with his mediocre endowments, the acquirement of distinction by brilliant discoveries, or heroic acts, or high achievements in art, implies faculties and feelings which he does not possess, it is not difficult to understand why he devotes himself heart and soul to business.

—Herbert Spencer "The Morals of Trade" Essays
Moral, Political, and Esthetic

SCIENCE, POWER, AND HUMILITY

It may be said, broadly, that science has simultaneously, and in equal measure, increased man's power and diminished his pride. In the Middle Ages, the earth was the center of the universe, and the human race was the principal object of divine solicitude. The first blow to this outlook, and perhaps the greatest, was the Copernican system, with the discovery that the earth is one of the smaller planets. The next blow was the doctrine of evolution, as to which traditionalists are still fighting a rearguard action. The next, which is only now beginning to be delivered, is the analysis of mind and soul by behaviorists and bio-chemists. I have heard it suggested by a bio-chemist that mysticism is due to excessive alkalinity of the blood. This particular doctrine may or may not be true,

but some equally painful explanation of the mystic emotion is pretty sure to be found before long. Physics, biology, psychology, have each in turn passed over from superstition to science, and have each in turn demanded sacrifices dear to our human conceit. The increase of power which men derive from science has, however, made these sacrifices endurable, and has allowed the scientific outlook to triumph in practice even with those who continue to reject it in its general and speculative aspects.⁶

—Bertrand Russell "Science" Chapter III of *Whither Mankind* Edited by Charles A. Beard

MECHANICS AND ESTHETICS

During the last thirty years we have become more conscious of the esthetic possibilities of the exact arts, and it is no accident that our newest instruments, the automobile and the aeroplane, are not the weakest but the best of our machined products, a distinction which they share with American kitchen equipment and bathroom fixtures. Under our very eyes, an improvement in design has taken place, transforming the awkward mass and the broken lines of the primitive auto into the unified mass and the slick stream lines of the modern car, or, by an even greater revolution in design, turning the imperfectly related planes of the push power aeroplane into the more buoyant, gull like tractor plane of today, with body and wing both gaining in beauty as they were adapted more carefully to the mechanical requirements of flight. So strong, so logical are these designs that they have inevitably a powerful imaginative effect, and one does not wonder at the impulse many European architects have succumbed to, to copy the forms of the aeroplane or the steamship even in buildings where their functions are foreign or irrelevant.⁷

—Lewis Mumford "The Arts" Chapter XII of *Whither Mankind* Edited by Charles A. Beard

⁶ Copyright 1928 Longmans Green & Co. Reprinted by permission

⁷ Copyright 1928 Longmans Green & Co. Reprinted by permission

TRANSPORTATION IN THE FUTURE

The reform of our railroads is certainly among the most pressing problems confronting us today, because our social and economic system, if it persists, will continue to be based on the free movement of goods and men. Railroads maintain broad rights of way that usually are the shortest lines through the densest concentrations of population. These rights of way are almost gradeless as compared with automobile highways, they have no sharp curves, and they are becoming free from obstruction by cross traffic. Suppose these rights of way were paved with concrete from edge to edge. Suppose they were divided into traffic lanes for varying services, and all their passengers and freight were carried in light powerful units of relatively small size and low cost, powered by internal combustion engines and borne on rubber tires. These privately operated, specialized highways then could perform a service which the public highways cannot perform and would relieve public highways of a vast load of commercial traffic.

The center lanes of these reborn "railroads" would be concrete paved but steel walled channels which would carry very high speed traffic. Torpedolike vehicles, automatically controlled, would be shot through these channels at speeds only reached by airplanes now—perhaps in excess of 200 miles per hour, since necessity for human steering and control would be eliminated. Instead of a Twentieth Century Limited leaving New York once a day for an overnight trip to Chicago, we would have capsules of manageable size departing on their breathless four hour runs at hourly intervals, or oftener.⁸

—Walter Dorwin Teague 'Planning the World of Tomorrow'

THE PICCOLO

The piccolo is one of the most effective of orchestral instruments, but also one of the most difficult to play. Due to the

⁸ *Popular Mechanics*, December 1940. Reprinted by permission.

fact that even with the Boehm fingering its range is entirely within the treble stave (from d" to a" "), it rivals the violin in the purity and timbre of its high notes, but in its notes from d" to a" it is feeble, attenuated, and lacking in expression.

The piccolo in D is the one most used in orchestras. Its effectiveness in various movements of a composition like Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony* cannot help but be evident to anyone.

—Student theme

GRANDFATHER AND EXPRESSIONISM

Our dramatics department is putting on Kaufman and Connelly's *Beggar on Horseback* next week, and I am playing the part of Gladys Cady, a rich girl but a "dumb Dora" who is crazy about Neil McRae, the handsome and musical hero of the play. My grandfather is coming to see the performance, and as the play is highly expressionistic and Grandfather never attended even high school, I am afraid he will find *Beggar on Horseback* quite confusing. That is why I have tried to tell him what expressionistic drama is like. I have told him it is like that song that was so popular the year Uncle Henry was a senior, "Did You Ever See a Dream Walking?" I have explained to him that Gladys' father does not really come to the wedding in silk hat, morning coat, and golf knickers, because there was really no wedding at all, the entire wedding scene represents just a silly dream that Neil McRae has, after taking a dose of Dr. Albert Rice's sleeping powders.

Even if Grandfather doesn't know what the show is all about, he will be pleased as punch to see his talented (?) granddaughter disporting herself in one of the leading roles. I expect, though, that he will have a case of acute disappointment when Neil finally marries Cynthia Mason, the other girl.

—Student theme

Argumentation

☞ SINCE THIS IS A TEXTBOOK devoted to the art of writing, we are not concerned with the subject of formal debating. We are, however, concerned with types of argumentative writing, and we must, therefore, give attention to such matters as conviction, persuasion, evidence, induction, deduction, syllogism, enthymeme, and sophistry.

1 THE CONTROVERSIAL ARTICLE

The kind of popularizing article that we have just considered in the previous chapter may, as we have seen, give its writer ample opportunity to express personal opinions. In subject-matter, however, it is essentially non-controversial. There can be, for instance, little question that Shakespeare and Milton and Wordsworth were great poets or that industrial chemistry has many important uses. The type of essay that we shall now consider, however—the controversial article—is written upon an essentially debatable subject. Several years ago, for example, there appeared in *Harper's Magazine* an article entitled "Radio—A Brief for the Defense," by Deems Taylor. This is clearly

a controversial article Its very title announces that the author's chief intention is to refute some charge or charges frequently made against radio

Argumentative purpose—

The types of monograph and essay that we have hitherto considered are fundamentally expository in aim, that is, they seek primarily to inform or explain The controversial article has a different purpose Although it may incidentally do a great deal of informing or explaining, its ultimate aim is to convert the presumably hostile or skeptical or indifferent reader to the writer's point of view In "Radio—A Brief for the Defense," for instance, Mr Taylor tries to demonstrate that our commercially sponsored American broadcasting system offers a greater amount of classical music, intelligent discussion, and unbiased information than the government-controlled broadcasting systems of England and other European countries In this article, then, Mr Taylor is primarily an arguer, only secondarily is he an expositor

Conviction and persuasion—

The two chief weapons of the arguer are conviction and persuasion Since conviction appeals to the intellect, and persuasion appeals to the emotions, the latter is often the more powerful weapon of the two because it appeals to a greater number of people, especially when used by the orator Conviction, however, being based upon logic rather than upon the feelings, is the sounder means of appeal In this connection, the student should realize that no assertion, however emphatic or eloquent it may be, amounts to proof One never demonstrates the truth of anything simply by declaring loudly or magnetically or repeatedly that it is the truth The heart may often be

deeply touched by winsome words, true or false, but the intellect insists upon proof And proof rests upon evidence and upon logic

Testimonial and circumstantial evidence—

In controversy and investigation generally, as well as in the courtroom particularly, there are two kinds of evidence testimonial and circumstantial Testimonial evidence, of course, is that kind of evidence presented by witnesses and authorities, and, as we have seen in our study of the research paper, the validity of this kind of evidence depends upon the competence, the habitual truthfulness, and the disinterestedness of the testifier Circumstantial evidence rests upon attendant circumstances For example,

you may find a man dying with a wound upon his head having exactly the form and character of the wound which is made by an axe, and, with due care in taking surrounding circumstances into account, you may conclude with the utmost certainty that the man has been murdered, that his death is the consequence of a blow inflicted by another man with that implement

—T H Huxley "Lectures on Evolution," in *American Addresses*

Induction, deduction, syllogism—

Formal reasoning is said by logicians to be inductive or deductive Inductive reasoning proceeds from the particular to the general, that is, from a specific fact to a general or universal truth Deductive reasoning proceeds in the opposite direction from a general or universal truth to a specific fact It will thus be seen that inductive reasoning involves investigation and experimentation, and that deductive reasoning is based upon axiom or authority Inductive reasoning, then, is indispensable to scientific

research Deductive reasoning, on the other hand, was the only kind of reasoning approved by mediaeval scholars prior to the Italian Renaissance

To comprehend more clearly the nature of inductive reasoning, let us say that at some time during the fifteenth century, some enterprising Venetian or Florentinian merchant sought to fabricate a kind of cloth that would be incombustible After numerous discouraging experiments, in which he found himself obliged to eliminate wool, cotton, linen, and silk from consideration, he finally discovered that an incombustible cloth could be woven from asbestos fiber From numerous particular experiments, in other words, this Italian merchant established the general principle that asbestos cloth will not burn This is the method of reasoning by which all scientific discoveries and inventions are effected It is, for instance, the method of the medical chemist who seeks to develop a serum that will immunize human beings against influenza He tries one formula and then another, seeking meanwhile to determine and isolate each of the various bacteria that may cause influenza

Now let us turn to the deductive method of reasoning—a method that really begins where inductive reasoning leaves off Let us suppose, for example, that I wish to purchase a quantity of incombustible cloth So far as I know, there may be more than one kind of incombustible cloth, but I happen to be certain—thanks to an old-time discovery—that asbestos cloth is incombustible I therefore reason that if I purchase asbestos cloth, I shall certainly get the kind of cloth that I especially wish

Deductive reasoning, when stated formally, is said by logicians to be syllogistic A syllogism consists of three items (1) the major premise, (2) the minor premise, (3) the conclusion The major premise states a general

truth The minor premise states a specific fact that lies entirely within the province of the major premise The conclusion states a specific fact that follows logically from the two premises Here, for instance, is a sound syllogism

Major premise All asbestos is incombustible

Minor premise This curtain is made of asbestos

Conclusion Therefore this curtain is incombustible

In the foregoing syllogism, it will be noticed, the word *asbestos* appears in both premises, but not in the conclusion The word that thus binds the premises is known technically as the middle In this connection, the student should observe that the middle term is used as the subject of the major premise, but as part of the predicate of the minor premise This change of construction is of the utmost importance, as may be seen from the following incorrect syllogism

Major premise All asbestos is incombustible

Minor premise This curtain is incombustible

Conclusion Therefore this curtain is made of asbestos

In the foregoing syllogism, the word *incombustible* is the one word used in both premises but not in the conclusion *Incombustible*, however, has been used as the predicate complement in both premises, and therein lies the difficulty, therein lies the error which is technically known as the undistributed middle To state the matter more simply, it will be readily perceived that although all asbestos may be incombustible, it is not necessarily true that asbestos is the only substance out of which incombustible fabrics may be made To use a different example of the same error in reasoning, suppose I say "Smith must

be an Englishman, for he is British " Syllogistically, in other words, I am reasoning as follows

Major premise All Englishmen are British

Minor premise Smith is British

Conclusion Therefore Smith is an Englishman

This, however, is absurd, for, as we all know, Englishmen are not the only British Scotsmen, Welshmen, and Scotch Irishmen are also British Consequently, the logical inference that I can make about Smith's nationality is as follows "Smith must be British, for he is an Englishman" In other words, although not all British are Englishmen, all Englishmen are British

Enthymeme—

Since controversial writing is informal rather than formal argumentation, the writer will very seldom state his reasoning in syllogistic form Usually he will make a statement that is so worded that the reader must infer a part of the formal syllogism Suppose, for instance, that I write "This curtain must be incombustible, for it is made of asbestos" Here, of course, I am implying the major premise, namely, that all asbestos is incombustible This informal method of stating a deductive bit of reasoning is known to logicians as enthymeme Enthymeme is used freely by all controversial writers—and quite properly so—but competent writers are scrupulously careful to make sure that all of their deductive reasoning *could* be stated correctly in syllogistic form In fact, a correct syllogism is the only sure test of soundness in deductive reasoning

Sophistry—

In the controversial article, as in the court room or on the debating rostrum, the arguer must be very careful to

avoid the pitfall of sophistry, or fallacious reasoning. The alert, intelligent reader or hearer will be equally careful to avoid it. A distinguished professor of logic once paid a famous American political orator the left handed compliment of declaring that that orator was an adept in the art of covering up fallacies. Unfortunately, the adroit covering up of fallacies may sometimes be highly effective, but it is never sound or honest. Unfortunately, too, the varieties of fallacious reasoning greatly outnumber the varieties of sound reasoning. In this study, then, we can consider only a small proportion of the known fallacies—only the few fallacies that are most common and most persistent.

Ill-defined terminology—

Let us suppose that I advance the argument that the totalitarian form of government is much more conducive to patriotism than is the democratic form. To prove my contention, I point out that whereas the press and the publicists in the United States complain loudly and frequently about the Roosevelt administration, no voice in Italy or Germany is ever raised against the political *status quo* of those countries. Of course there may be more than one fallacy in this argument, but the fallacy that concerns us at this moment is the fallacy of ill-defined terminology. My argument about patriotism and totalitarianism may not convince you in the least—for perhaps your definition of patriotism does not coincide with mine. Perhaps, indeed, I have neglected to give you my definition of patriotism.

False analogy—

Analogy, which Webster defines as “resemblance of relations,” is very frequently used both in exposition and

in argumentation, for all of us think constantly in terms of the comparative relationships that we perceive round about us on every hand. Someone has said that analogy makes a good servant, but a bad master. By this is meant that analogy, legitimately used, is very helpful in clarifying a point, but that analogy, illegitimately used, can quickly lead us to false conclusions. One might convincingly argue, for example, that all of the nations that have adopted fascism in recent years have done so for economic reasons. According to this argument, the Italians and the Germans, when forced to choose between personal liberty and social security, chose the latter. By analogy it might be stated that the English are now faced with the same unpleasant choice and that, regardless of the outcome of Britain's war with the dictators, the English will meet the problem in precisely the same way as the Italians and the Germans have done. The fallacy here lies in the fact that the argument makes no allowance for important distinctions that might exist between the English on the one hand, and the Italians and the Germans on the other. It goes upon the highly dangerous assumption that there is nothing in English traditions or English institutions or the English national character that might prevent John Bull from following the road that leads to totalitarianism. In other words, it jumps at a sort of conclusion that we see disproved repeatedly in our everyday experience, namely, that because an analogous situation exists in some particulars, it must necessarily exist in other particulars.

Mistaken causal relation—

A great deal of argument, both oral and written, turns out to be futile because of many arguers' inability to distinguish coincidence from causation. Early in the nine-

teen-thirties it was frequently contended in this country that the policies of the Hoover administration must have caused the great business depression. The argument in support of this contention ran somewhat as follows: "Throughout the Coolidge administration the country became increasingly prosperous, whereas long before the first year of the Hoover administration was over there occurred a gigantic stock market collapse—a collapse which seriously damaged the entire economic structure of the country, and from which the country has not yet recovered. Therefore the Hoover administration must have brought on the terrible depression." The argument just quoted is a rather extreme example of the fallacy of mistaken causal relation—the fallacy known technically as *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*. If you were writing a controversial article, you might not be guilty of so patently fallacious reasoning as that quoted above. All too easily, however, you might fall into a less obvious but no less egregious error of the same general class. All of us incline toward associativeness in our thinking, that is, we are fond of "putting two and two together." Hence we are constantly prone to weave successive events into real or fanciful chains of cause and effect. If our chain is genuine, its worth will be appreciated by all discriminating persons. If, however, it is counterfeit, it will never command a good price in any reputable market.

Begging the question—

One of the most persistent and troublesome of all fallacies is that fallacy known as *petitio principii*, or begging the question. When a speaker or a writer falls into this bad kind of reasoning, he usually argues in a circle. In other words, he starts with a false or a dubious premise, makes a deduction from that, and concludes with the

assertion that he has proved his premise. If I argue that the present unjust Neutrality Act should be repealed, I am guilty of begging the question, for, reduced to syllogistic terms, my argument runs as follows

<i>Major premise</i>	All unjust laws should be repealed
<i>Minor premise</i>	Our present Neutrality Act is an unjust law
<i>Conclusion</i>	Therefore our present Neutrality Act should be repealed

A careful study of the foregoing syllogism reveals the fact that the error in this particular deduction lies in the minor premise. Certainly, all unjust laws should be repealed. For this reason, *if* our present Neutrality Act is an unjust law, it should be repealed. But have I offered evidence that our present Neutrality Act *is* unjust? Am I not merely asserting that it is? An extremely important point to remember about all deductive reasoning is that a conclusion is logically invalid unless both of the premises from which it is drawn are indisputably sound.

Legitimate persuasion—

In an earlier paragraph of this chapter we noted the distinction between conviction and persuasion. We also pointed out that since the former is intellectual and the latter is emotional, the former is the sounder means of appeal. From all of this, however, the student is not to infer that the use of persuasion by a speaker or a writer is necessarily illegitimate or undesirable. As a matter of fact, most of the best things ever accomplished by people acting in groups have been instigated by the soul-stirring words of some persuasive agitator. How great a debt the abolition of slavery in this country owes to the poetry of John Greenleaf Whittier and the oratory of William Lloyd Garrison will never be known. Certainly it is a huge

debt The writer of a controversial article, then, need not feel obligated to confine his appeals to the cold reasoning of his readers He may with equal propriety appeal to their pride, their sense of honor and fair play, their humanitarian or patriotic impulses, and even their selfish desire for their own individual happiness or comfort

In an anti-war article appearing in the January, 1939, issue of *Good Housekeeping* will be found the following passage

There are so many things for us to remember from the last war, for by remembering we shall refuse to take part in their repeating Although I was not overseas during hostilities, I was there shortly after the Armistice And I have memories that will never leave me! Piccadilly Circus in London on a bank holiday—the files of broken men, blind, crippled, and scarred, and the unescapable click of countless wooden legs on the stone pavement!

Again in London in a mental hospital—the tragic and hopeless emptiness of the face of a mother who had picked up the fragments of her little daughter from the ruins left by a Zeppelin raid An orphans home in France—the children with the wizened faces of old men and women, they had been caught in the war zone and had lived like hunted animals, taking cover in the debris and coming out only at night to pasture on grass and weeds

And everywhere graves, countless acres of them—the graves of the youth of France, of England, of Germany, of Canada, of Austria, of America These are the things that war marks indelibly on the mind If war ever solved anything, it might have some justification To say that it has any justification is mocking God¹

—Genevieve Parkhurst “The Peace Amendment”

The foregoing paragraph is a highly effective piece of controversial writing, and—except for rather obvious instances of begging the question at the beginning and at

¹ *Good Housekeeping* Jan 1939 Reprinted by permission

the end of the paragraph—it is a perfectly legitimate bit of persuasion

It is to be observed that since persuasion appeals to the emotions, and since the emotions are reached through the imagination, the persuasive expository writer inevitably borrows some of the material of description. It is also to be observed that persuasive writing, in order to be legitimate, must be sound and honest. It must never resort to bathos or “fine writing,” and it must avoid making any statements or implications that can be refuted by genuine logic.

EXERCISES

Test the validity of each of the following arguments

1 If we insist upon remaining strictly neutral, we cannot possibly be drawn into another world war. Didn't Sweden and the Netherlands succeed in remaining neutral throughout the last great war?

2 Thomas E. Dewey would make an ideal President, for he has been brilliantly successful as a district attorney.

3 Green Township must be the foremost agricultural township in Ohio. It is the greatest agricultural township in Wayne County, which is the chief agricultural county in the state.

4 Japan, a pagan country, is much more progressive than many Christian countries. Therefore Christianity must be a hindrance to progress.

5 Why should I pay two dollars to hear Fritz Kreisler or the Philadelphia Orchestra? By turning on my radio at the right times I can hear the very best of music without paying a cent.

6 Unless you plan to be a teacher of Latin or Greek, it will be a waste of time for you to study these languages in college. Of what possible benefit could the dead languages ever be to an engineer or a business man?

7 She will certainly be a successful teacher. She has had every course in education that the college offers, and she has received an A grade in each one of these courses.

Restate the following enthymemes in syllogistic form.

1 The enlargement of our stadium would result in a much stronger football schedule, for with larger crowds as an inducement, more "big time" teams would be willing to play here.

2 Mr. O'Connor must be a Roman Catholic, he is an officer in the local lodge of Knights of Columbus.

3 Unless the Republican party abandons one of its salient traditions, Mr. Willkie will not be its nominee in 1944. No defeated Republican presidential standard-bearer has ever been renominated.

4 Goering is the bosom friend and chief adviser of the despicable Hitler. Need any further comment be made upon him?

5 I feel certain that I shall enjoy reading Edward Mather's biography of Nathaniel Hawthorne, for I am greatly interested in any new light that may be shed upon the life and personality of Hawthorne.

6 Professor Caldwell's pronunciation of *new*, *duty*, and *floor* convinces me that he is a Southerner.

7 Our fraternity dance should be given before Christmas or postponed until February. Semester examinations come in January.

2 THE EDITORIAL

Of the two main types of articles in every daily newspaper—the news story and the editorial—the former, which is essentially narrative, relates the happenings of the day with little or no expository comment. Its nature is such that it must be strictly objective—that is, it must carefully refrain from interposing any personal opinions that the reporter may have. In contradistinction to the news story there is the editorial or, as the British prefer to call it, the

leader The editorial, which is essentially expository and more or less subjective,² complements the news story by offering the interpretations and comments which good journalistic practice compels the news story to omit

Brevity—

Editorials in general may be classed as short controversial articles In tone and spirit they differ little from controversial magazine essays To be acceptable to thoughtful readers, they must conform to the same rules of sound reasoning and legitimate persuasion Their chief peculiarity, as compared with controversial magazine articles, is their extreme brevity The average magazine article runs into thousands of words, the average editorial is concluded within from two hundred to eight hundred words In style, therefore, the editorial is likely to be much more compressed than the magazine article Its illustrative examples, as a rule, are few and short, but, in a good editorial, are always to the point

Construction—

The typical editorial follows three successive steps, which we may conveniently speak of as statement, amplification, and argument, respectively In other words, it usually begins with a concise general statement of the topic under discussion It then clarifies the topic by means of an amplified, detailed statement Having thus oriented the reader, it concludes by arguing the writer's point of view A good example of editorial construction will be found in "Wings for Youth," a short editorial appearing in the December 31, 1938, issue of the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* This editorial begins with the statement that the United States government has just announced

² That is, it expresses the personal viewpoint of the editorial writer

plans for the training of twenty thousand youths as civilian pilots. It then explains the relation of these plans to the concurrently proposed construction of thirteen thousand new war planes. Having made this explanation, it is ready to argue the following points: first, that since international relations are dangerously strained, an emergency might quickly arise; second, that in the event of such emergency these civilian pilots could rapidly be converted into army pilots; third, that since the immediate program will be conducted by the National Youth Administration rather than by the War Department, the plan is not alarmingly militaristic; and fourth, that if no emergency arises, these trained civilian pilots can readily find places in America's great and ever-expanding commercial airways.

Relation to the student—

The student who keeps well informed upon current events has long ago discovered the value of reading editorials, not only in the daily newspapers, but also in such weekly journals of opinion as the *Nation* and the *New Republic*. He has discovered that the conciseness and the interpretativeness of the editorial give it an instructive quality that the most detailed, most ably written news story can never supply. But the relation between the editorial and the student is even closer than all this. Every alert student is interested in the curricular and the extracurricular activities on his own campus. He is consequently interested in what the editors of his college newspaper may have to say about the merits of these activities. He instinctively thinks in terms of what he himself would say if he were in the editors' place. In fact, every student who writes at all, and who has well-informed opinions of his own, is potentially an editor.

EXERCISES

1 Study and analyze ten or twelve recent newspaper editorials Which ones do you find particularly effective? Why? Do you find fallacies in any of these editorials? If so, point them out

2 Write two or three editorials of your own, choosing from the following subjects

Should the Constitution Forbid a Third Term?

The Problem of American Neutrality

Economic Defense of the Western Hemisphere

Freedom of Speech Its Use and Abuse

State Economy and the State Universities

Putting College Football in Its Place

Why Colleges Should (or Should Not) Abolish Final Examinations

Regulating Class Absences

Faculty Committees and Professorial Efficiency

The Responsibilities of a Fraternity Man (or a Sorority Woman)

The Campus Theater Student or Community Enterprise

A Solution of the Local Parking Problem

ILLUSTRATIVE SELECTIONS

THE FOLLY OF DIVISION

Mr President and Gentlemen of the Convention If we could first know where we are, and whither we are tending, we could better judge what to do, and how to do it We are now far into the fifth year since a policy was initiated with the avowed object and confident purpose of putting an end to slavery agitation Under the operation of that policy, that agitation has not only not ceased, but has constantly augmented In my opinion, it will not cease until a crisis shall have been reached and passed "A house divided against itself cannot stand" I believe this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free I do not expect

the Union to be dissolved, I do not expect the house to fall, but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing, or all the other. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction, or its advocates will push it forward till it shall become alike lawful in all the States, old as well as new, North as well as South.

—Abraham Lincoln Speech delivered at the Republican State Convention, Springfield, Ill., June 16, 1858
Lincoln Douglas Debates

IMPORTANCE OF PRESERVING THE UNION

He [Mr Lincoln] tells you the Union cannot exist unless the States are all free or all slave, he tells you that he is opposed to making them all slave, and hence he is for making them all free, in order that the Union may exist, and yet he will not say that he will not vote against another Slave State, knowing that the Union must be dissolved if he votes for it. I ask you if that is fair dealing. The true intent and inevitable conclusion to be drawn from his first Springfield speech is, that he is opposed to the admission of any more Slave States under any circumstance. If he is so opposed, why not say so? If he believes this Union cannot endure divided into Free and Slave States, that they must all become free in order to save the Union, he is bound as an honest man to vote against any more Slave States. If he believes it, he is bound to do it. Show me that it is my duty, in order to save the Union, to do a particular act, and I will do it, if the Constitution does not prohibit it. I am not for the dissolution of the Union under any circumstances. I will pursue no course of conduct that will give just cause for the dissolution of the Union. The hope of the friends of freedom throughout the world rests upon the perpetuity of this Union. The downtrodden and oppressed people who are suffering under European despotism all look with hope and anxiety to the American Union as the

only resting place and permanent home of freedom and self-government

—Stephen A. Douglas Reply to Lincoln, Joint Debate,
Freeport, Ill., Aug. 27, 1858 *Lincoln Douglas De-*
bates

PRIVATE ENTERPRISE

I am an individualist. I would never be happy to be a mere cog in a wheel, to live in a house precisely like every other house in the neighborhood. I would never be happy in civilian uniform, or if every choice concerning my life were made by someone else. To me the monotony of standardization, of regimentation, would be unbearable. Under private enterprise there is more education, freedom of conscience, liberty to choose one's occupation—in short, more freedom of the will. Give me America, where private enterprise yet holds sway.

The principles of private enterprise, like the principles of Christianity, are old. At the same time they are eternally young and true. They have brought America to a high state of civilization and I believe that they must continue to be our guiding principles if we are to maintain that civilization. Other principles—socialism, communism, fascism—claim to be modern and superior. Yet they too are old, as history proves, and they, like the forces of hate, militarism and fear, will never be best for mankind.

Yes, even though I am poor, I favor private enterprise because I love freedom and all the privileges it brings me as an individual.³

—H. E. Coffey "Why I Favor Private Enterprise"

HONEST FOOTBALL

Here is our supreme problem—that of honesty. Our colleges and universities are supposedly the source of our social

³ *Forbes* Oct. 15, 1940 Reprinted by permission

morality and idealism. From these institutions we hurl thunderbolts at the corruptions of politics and the dishonesties of business. What right have professors and college presidents to denounce the deceits of others while afraid to expose the evasions of their own athletics?

College presidents and faculties must evade the issue no longer. The time is ripe for lifting football to a higher plane. Players should be openly given their necessary college expenses. Their pay, subsidies and jobs should be fully published. Thus the college game would at least be brought up to the moral level now maintained by professional football and baseball. In other words, football should be "taken in" and its importance recognized. Its emotional benefits should be used as a part of our educational experience. In brief, the old flag of football needs to be unfurled, placed on the ramparts and waved—honestly.⁴

—Ralph Cooper Hutchison (President of Washington and Jefferson College) "Let's Make Football Respectable"

OUR NATIONAL HEALTH

The proportion of selective service registrants who are being rejected as unfit either by the draft board physicians or the army medical examiners is hardly a good advertisement for the national health. Draft board doctors in New York City, it is estimated, are currently rejecting sixty per cent of the men who come before them. And when the remainder are sent on to the army induction centers, where they receive a more rigorous examination, another twenty per cent are found below standard. The chief causes of rejection by the army examiners seem to be bad eyes and bad teeth, and while the causes of the former are largely unknown it is well established that many dental defects can be traced to malnutrition. We have no doubt that the army, needing only a fraction of the men eligible for the draft, is attempting to skim the cream and

⁴ *The Gambolier* (W & J campus newspaper) Reprinted by permission

has devised correspondingly severe tests. Even so, the indication that something like two thirds of our young men are not in first class physical condition is disturbing. It is also proof that the best way in which this nation could invest some of its surplus capital would be in a really comprehensive health program.⁵

—Editorial, *The Nation*, Dec 7, 1940

AN ENGLISH-SPEAKING UNION

By union with the British Commonwealth we cannot hope to reform the world, either with moral preachments or at the point of a gun. We cannot expect to redraw the map of Europe at another Versailles. But we can promote our own future security for one hundred, perhaps two hundred years.


We can, moreover, achieve these immediate gains. We can prove that the power of collaborative organization is not all on the totalitarian side. We can end Hitler's dream of world domination through world revolution. All the alliances he may make with the other totalitarian states of Europe and Asia—based on nothing but mutual greed—will be profitless while control of the seas and world trade remains with us. Most important, we can give to the oppressed people of the captive nations proof that at last there is dynamism in the democratic faith, there is alive on earth a mighty unified force ready to negotiate a just peace—not on the suicidal terms of appeasement and not on the terms of the provedly rotten status quo.⁶

—Robert E. Sherwood "Toward an English Speaking Union"

⁵ Reprinted by permission

⁶ *Life*, Oct 7, 1940. Reprinted by permission

Critical Writing

 A BRIEF ELEMENTARY study of critical writing should probably begin with a definition of terms. What is criticism? In the popular mind, all too frequently, criticism is censure, to criticize is to find fault. If, however, we make a close etymological study of the word *criticism*, we find that true criticism is not necessarily censure at all—that the critic may be as free in his words of praise as in his words of blame. As a matter of fact, criticism is judgment, and, of course, judgment may be favorable or unfavorable or impartial in its estimates. Good critical writing, then, is an intelligent estimate of the merits or demerits of a work of literature or art, and its chief considerations are esthetic and philosophical. In other words, it seeks to determine whether the work studied conforms to accepted standards of beauty and truth.

1 CRITICISM AND SPECIFICATION

Sound criticism is not a matter of irrational likes or dislikes. The bare statement that one likes or dislikes a certain book is of no critical value, and the statement that

a book is interesting or dull is scarcely more helpful. In what respects is the book interesting or dull? The true critic knows what he likes and why he likes it, and he realizes that the more specific his explanations are, the more weight his criticism will have.

2 IMPORTANCE OF BACKGROUND

In no other form of writing is background so important as in criticism. The sensible person who has had no training in music or art would hardly presume to write a criticism of a symphony concert or a landscape painting. The sensible person who would criticize books must appreciate the fact that background is quite as important in literature as in the fine arts. Not until one has read many books—including books about books—is one really competent to criticize a single book. This does not mean that the young critic must have read all of the great creative writers from Homer and Sophocles down to Galsworthy and O'Neill, or all of the great critics from Aristotle down to Van Doren. It does not even mean that he shall have mastered a work such as George Saintsbury's three-volume history of criticism. It does, however, mean that there are certain minimum requirements which he should have met.

The student who is adequately equipped to write literary criticism has read at least a few of the greatest plays of Shakespeare, a few of the greatest poems of Milton, and a few of the greatest novels of Fielding, Scott, Jane Austen, Dickens, and Thackeray. To him such names as Chaucer, Spenser, Wordsworth, Keats, Browning, and Hardy are somewhat more than mere names. He may not have actually studied the critical works of Aristotle, Longinus, Boileau, Dr. Johnson, Hazlitt, or Matthew Arnold, but he knows in a general way what each of these eminent

critics stood for. He knows, in short, not only some of the great classics of literature, but also their general place in the development of literary history. He has at least a superficial acquaintance with main trends and tendencies. He can tell what some of the great classics are about, and why they have certain qualities. He knows, for instance, why sixteenth-century Shakespeare wrote romantic plays about kings, and why nineteenth-century Ibsen wrote realistic plays about middle-class business and professional men. He can explain why the novel did not make its appearance until the eighteenth century, and why it has been the most popular form of literature ever since then.

3 ACQUIRING BACKGROUND

It is possible that in high school you had a survey course in English literature—a course that dealt with the chief authors and the main literary trends in chronological order. If so, you are very fortunate. If you did not have such a course, and if you aspire to success as a book reviewer, you must acquire a background upon your own initiative. A good beginning would be to read a book such as Moody and Lovett's *History of English Literature* and to follow that procedure by a systematic and extensive reading of the classics set forth by these authors as being most significant. And since your book reviewing will certainly involve American works as well as English works, you should also turn to some such textbook as Boynton's *History of American Literature* or *Literature and American Life*. Bibliographies will suggest many other helpful books, including some that are much more detailed and intensive than the texts just mentioned. In this connection, it must be strongly emphasized that books about books are never an adequate substitute for the books them-

selves Obviously, the only valuable criticisms are written by persons who know both creative and critical literature

4 PREPARATION FOR WRITING A BOOK REVIEW

Let us assume that after acquiring a workable general background you set out to review a particular book Your first task, manifestly, will be to read the book carefully, taking notes or marking passages as you read Then for your own guidance you will probably write a brief synopsis of the book, an abstract in which you summarize concisely the general drift or gist of the book, but you will not necessarily include all or any of this synopsis in your finished review You are now prepared to study the author's purpose and to determine the extent to which he has succeeded in his purpose In the review of any kind of book, the writer's style and methods will almost certainly be important considerations If the book is a novel, you will wish to consider the three component elements of plot, characterization, and setting, and you will seek to decide which of these elements is made most prominent You will wish also to observe whether the general tone of the novel is realistic, romantic, or sentimental, whether the motivation is logical, whether the characters are individuals or types, and whether the characters and the setting are made as vivid and lifelike as possible If the book is a drama, you will study it very much in the manner just suggested for the novel, and, in addition, you will be interested to see whether the dramatist has followed the "well-made play" formula of a Scribe or an Ibsen or a Pinero, and whether he has made any effort to conform to the classical Unities If the book is a volume of poems, versification and imagery will be among your foremost considerations If the book is a biography, you will wish to note whether it is a hagio-

graphical memorial tribute, a sensational piece of "debunking," or an honest objective study

5 A NOVEL REVIEWED

In the October 23, 1938, issue of the *New York Times Book Review* will be found a short but highly appreciative review of a recent English novel, *Dr Bradley Remembers*, by Francis Brett Young. In five succinct paragraphs the reviewer, Percy Hutchison, has discussed illuminatingly the background, the plot, the characterization, the tone, and the style of this novel. A brief analysis of these paragraphs will be worth our while. In the first paragraph the reviewer points out that Dr. Young is peculiarly well qualified to write a novel about the medical profession, since Dr. Young was himself a practicing physician before he turned to literature. The next two paragraphs of the review are devoted mainly to a discussion of the plot—a discussion which is satisfyingly informative, but which carefully avoids revealing too much about the outcome. In the two remaining paragraphs the reviewer gives the reader to understand that however adequate the plot and the setting of this novel may be, the most noteworthy feature of *Dr Bradley Remembers* is perhaps its characterization. As illustrative of this point, Mr. Hutchison takes two outstanding characters. John Bradley, a plodding, conscientious village physician, and Jacob Medhurst, a brilliant and wealthy but erratic and temperamental city practitioner. He finds Dr. Bradley notable not only for his warm, kindly humanity and his personal and professional loyalty, but also for his fortitude in the face of unremitting toil, scanty financial reward, and domestic tragedy. As for old Dr. Medhurst, Mr. Hutchison believes that because of the latter's humorous picturesqueness of appearance, action, and speech, he might well have

walked out of a Dickens novel. In Mr Hutchison's opinion, the general tone of *Dr Bradley Remembers* is commendably unpretentious and unsensational, "without pyrotechnics or fanfare." Its style he finds to be agreeably cadenced, "but not overcadenced, with generally the right word, but with no straining after the ultimate word."

The review just discussed is, as has been said, rather brief, in fact, it covers but little more than a column of a quarto page. A longer review might well include a number of interesting things that Mr Hutchison does not have time or space to mention. It might point out, for instance, that for almost two decades Dr Young has been a fairly (though not an excessively) prolific novelist, and that in almost all of his novels the medical profession figures prominently. It might observe, further, that although his novels are always too artistic and too broadly human to degenerate into veiled medical tracts, he does occasionally administer a little more "medicine" than the average general reader can assimilate. It might indicate that Dr Young has an exceptionally strong sense of the vivid and the pictorial, and that he is almost equally at home in Birmingham or London streets and in the English countryside. Finally, it might appraise the much-repeated critical dictum that Francis Brett Young is John Galsworthy's successor as dean of gentlemanly British novelists.

6 A BIOGRAPHY REVIEWED

Much shorter and much less favorable than Hutchison's review of Young's *Dr Bradley Remembers* is a review of Glyn Roberts's biography of Sir Henri Deterding, a recently deceased Anglo-Dutch multimillionaire. This latter review, which appears unsigned in the August 20,

1938 *Nation*, is so very brief that we quote it in full

THE MOST POWERFUL MAN IN THE WORLD By Glyn Roberts
Covici Friede \$3

Sir Henri Deterding, the villain of this story, is the man who built up the Royal Dutch Shell combine to a position challenging the position of Standard Oil. During the war he played a prominent part in floating the Allies to victory on a tide of oil and for his services received a British knighthood although he has never abandoned his Dutch citizenship. In the post-war era, while extending the operations of his trust in every part of the world, he has chiefly been prominent on account of his unrelenting hostility to the Soviet Union, which he considers stole his valuable and strategic Caucasian oil fields. According to this book he has been behind every intrigue against Russia and has been one of the chief financial supporters of the Nazis. His story is one which definitely deserves wide publicity, and Mr Roberts has shown great diligence in collecting every scrap of information throwing light on his activities. It is all the more pity, therefore, that the completed job is not better. The documentation is inadequate, too much of the evidence is mere hearsay, and several obvious confusions of names do not increase confidence in the general accuracy. The interpretation is intended to be Marxian but is by no means consistent. Deterding is portrayed first as the mere creature of events and then as dominating them, yet again, he is only a puppet in the hands of "the lean-jowled old men who guard the [British] Empire's permanent interests." The book would have been greatly improved by the severe pruning of its digressions and repetitions, but no editing could have cured the style, which can only be described as *Time* with an Oxford accent.¹

—*Op cit*, pp 187-188

A careful study of the foregoing review will reveal four main considerations: first, a summary of Deterding's chief

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international activities, real or alleged, second, a complaint that the book is digressive, repetitious, and poorly documented, third, an implication that the author's portrait of his subject is biased and inconsistent, and fourth, an opinion that the style of the book is pseudo-clever and irritatingly affected

A longer review would undoubtedly be more illustrative, more specific, than the notice in the *Nation*. It would probably tell when and how Deterding acquired his huge fortune and his far-flung international interests, and why he retained his Dutch citizenship despite his acceptance of a British title. And it would certainly give concrete examples of what the reviewer considers digressiveness, repetitiousness, inadequate documentation, biased and inconsistent viewpoint, and vicious style. Furthermore, on the logical assumption that reputable publishers do not print utterly worthless books and that reputable periodicals do not deign to review them, it might discover and point out a few positive merits in this generally disappointing volume.

7 DRAMATIC CRITICISM

That form of writing commonly known as dramatic criticism is much more than the term implies, for it undertakes to consider drama not only as literature, but also as theatrical presentation. To determine whether a play is well written and well organized, one does not have to see it acted upon the stage, one has only to read it attentively. The task of the dramatic critic, however, does not stop at that point. He must give attention not only to the written or printed text of the play, but also to such matters as direction, staging, casting, costuming, make-up, and acting, and he must be sufficiently versed in these matters to know why and how an inferior production may

kill a good play, and how and why a superior production may raise a mediocre play to the level of an outstanding theatrical success

Unless a student has had practical experience in the professional or the amateur theater, or unless he has had courses in the drama and dramatic production, he should perhaps not essay dramatic criticism. In this field, however, as in the field of literary criticism, one can learn a great deal through independent reading and observation. Good books and articles on the drama and the theater, particularly the contemporary drama and theater, are so exceedingly numerous that we cannot attempt even a much abridged list of them here, in fact, a full bibliography of them would occupy a good-sized volume. Consequently, the student who wishes to increase his theoretical knowledge of the drama and the theater had better begin by going to the library and consulting the card index and the *Reader's Guide*. He can then read such helpful general works as Martha Bellinger's *History of the Drama*, Benjamin Brawley's *Short History of the English Drama*, Allardyce Nicoll's *British Drama*, Arthur Hobson Quinn's *History of the American Drama*, George P. Baker's *Technique of the Drama*, and Sheldon Cheney's *The Theater*. He can also make a practice of keeping in touch with such periodicals as the *Stage* and the *Theatre Arts Monthly* and of following the reviews of such authoritative theatrical critics as J. Brooks Atkinson, Joseph Wood Krutch, and George Jean Nathan. Meanwhile, it is presupposed that he will read and see as many good contemporary plays as possible. In any well-equipped library the cream of contemporary drama will be found in such anthologies as Chandler and Cordell's *Twentieth-Century Plays*, Tucker's *Twenty-five Modern Plays*, and Whitman's *Representative Modern Dramas*, and the best of the very latest

plays will be found under separate covers. For many students the problem of seeing good plays will not be so easily solved. Students living far from New York or any other large metropolitan center may have little or no opportunity to see Broadway productions or even good professional stock productions. Fortunately, however, almost every college in the land now has its own campus theater, which presents at least three or four plays a year, and the majority of campus theaters are directed by well-trained, well equipped instructors. In this connection, the student may learn much in a practical way by "talking shop" with the professor of dramatics and with advanced students in dramatics.

8 CRITICIZING MOTION PICTURES

All of us know what we like and what we dislike in the abundant fare that Hollywood offers us, but few of us know much about the technical problems involved in the making of a motion picture. Ever since the movies have become vocal, the criticism of them has closely paralleled that of stage plays. There remain, however, a number of important distinctions between the movies and the legitimate theater—distinctions of which every discerning critic will take cognizance. Peculiar to the movies, for instance, are all of the technical problems of cinematographic photography. Equally distinguishable is the fact that physical conditions tend to make the motion picture much less concentrated than the stage play, that elaborate settings, numerous changes of scene, and large ensemble effects are much more practicable in the movies than upon the legitimate stage. It is also to be remembered that the vast and indiscriminately democratic character of the movie audience places it upon a definitely lower cultural level than the audience of the legitimate theater.

The card index and the *Reader's Guide* will direct the

student to illuminating books and articles on the technique of the motion pictures. In the reading of movie critiques—an excellent practice if done with discrimination—the student will have to exercise much caution, for of the surprisingly large number of motion picture magazines, few contain reviews of real critical value. Of virtually no critical value at all are the press agents' advance notices which appear in every newspaper, large or small, and which are advertisements rather than candid judgments. The best movie reviews are to be found in the metropolitan dailies *after* the initial local showing of the picture, and in such periodicals as the *Stage*, the *New Yorker*, *Judge*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, the *Nation*, and the *New Republic*.

EXERCISES

1 Read carefully the article "Criticism," *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (14th edition), Vol VI, pp 727-729. Write a 500 word summary of the article.

2 Follow the same procedure with regard to the article "Criticism, Historical Sketch," Thrall and Hibbard's *Handbook to Literature*, pp 104-114. Below the middle of page 113 of that article you will find cross references to a number of important critical terms, including *classicism*, *decorum*, *didacticism*, *expressionism*, *humanism*, *impressionism*, *naturalism*, *neoclassicism*, *realism*, *romanticism*, *sentimentalism*, *style*, and *Unities*. Look up any of these terms that you cannot readily define.

3 Make a practice of reading the current book reviews in the *New York Times Book Review*, the *New York Herald-Tribune Books*, and the *Saturday Review of Literature*. Learn also, however, to form your own independent judgments of the books that you read.

4 In your local daily—or in the metropolitan daily that you read regularly—you will probably find a weekly book review department. To what extent do you find the reviews

in this department sound and discriminating? To what extent do you find that the reviewers have done their reading too cursorily or without sufficient literary or critical background?

5 Write a short review of some novel, some book of poems, some biography, or some critical work that you have read recently. The periodicals listed in Exercise 3 will keep you fully informed as to the identity and the general nature of every important new book. Before you start writing your review, find out as much as possible about the author of the book that you have read. What other books (if any) has he written? What salient characteristics do these books have in common?

6 If you are a musician, write a criticism of the next concert or recital that you attend. Is the program well balanced? Are the renditions as satisfying in expression as in technique or vice versa? If the concert is orchestral, is there a good balance and co ordination of wood winds, brasses, and strings? How do the solo effects compare with the ensemble effects?

7 If you have acquired sufficient background, write a criticism of the next professional or community or campus theatrical performance that you see. If the performance is a community or a campus affair, be very careful not to let your personal prejudices interfere with your judgments of individual members of the cast. If you can obtain a copy of the play, be sure to read it either before or after the performance.

8 Write a criticism of the next motion picture that you see, stressing the qualities that you feel most competent to pass judgment upon. Choose preferably a picture of which you have not read any reviews.

ILLUSTRATIVE SELECTIONS

BUNYAN'S STYLE

The style of Bunyan is delightful to every reader, and invaluable as a study to every person who wishes to obtain a

wide command over the English language The vocabulary is the vocabulary of the common people There is not an expression, if we except a few technical terms of theology, which would puzzle the rudest peasant We have observed several pages which do not contain a single word of more than two syllables Yet no writer has said more exactly what he meant to say For magnificence, for pathos, for vehement exhortation, for subtle disquisition, for every purpose of the poet, the orator, and the divine, this homely dialect, the dialect of plain working men, was perfectly sufficient There is no book in our literature on which we would so readily stake the fame of the old unpolluted English language, no book which shows so well how rich that language is in its own proper wealth, and how little it has been improved by all that it has borrowed

—Thomas Babington Macaulay Review of Robert Southey's edition of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* The *Edinburgh Review*, Dec., 1830

CHARACTERS OF DICKENS

The allied families of Jellyby and Turveydrop are in Dickens's happiest vein, though Mrs Jellyby is a coarse exaggeration of an existing folly They may, we think, stand beside the Micawbers Mrs Jellyby's daughter Caddy is the only female in the book we thoroughly relish there is a blending of pathos and fun in the description of her under the tyranny of Borrioboola Gha, that is irresistible, and her rapid transformation from a sulky, morose, overgrown child, to a graceful and amiable young woman, under the genial influence of Esther Summerson, is quite Cinderella-like, and as charming as any fairy tale Inspector Bucket, of the Detective Force, bears evidence of the careful study of this admirable department of our Police by the editor of *Household Words*, and, as in the case of Kenge and Vholes, the professional capacity is here the object, and we do not require a portraiture of the man and his affections Poor Joe, the street-sweeping urchin, is drawn with a skill that is never more

effectively exercised than when the outcasts of humanity are its subjects, a skill which seems to depart in proportion as the author rises in the scale of society depicted. Dickens has never yet succeeded in catching a tolerable likeness of man or woman whose lot is cast among the high born and wealthy. Whether it is that the lives of such present less that is outwardly funny or grotesque, less that strikes the eye of a man on the look out for oddity and point, or that he knows nothing of their lives, certain it is that his people of station are the vilest daubs, and Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, with his wife and family circle, are no exceptions.

—George Brimley. Review of Dickens's *Bleak House*. The
(London) *Spectator*, Sept. 24, 1853

WITHIN THE GRASP?

Anything that leans ever so little towards a return to "the grand old fortifying classical curriculum" may always be sure of a good word from us, so we are bound to give this work an attenuated sort of recommendation on general principles, although there is much about it that is quite beyond our understanding. A good seven eighths of the book sounds like teaching your grandmother how to sift ashes, it lavishes great prolixity on procedures which any competent student would naturally follow without being told. Again, if Mr. Adler's students can't read, why are they in college? A college is no place for people who can't read, they should be sent back to the wood pile. Again, we think that the number of those who can't read and will never be able to read is enormously in excess of Mr. Adler's estimate. Again, Mr. Adler's notion that "almost all of the great books in every field are within the grasp of all normally intelligent men" seems to us to need a deal of sifting. We do not know what he means by "normally intelligent," but if he means the average run of intelligence in our population, or in the student body of our schools and colleges, we believe he is deplorably wrong. So also, in our opinion, the book's subtitle, "The Art of Getting a Liberal Education," savors strongly of quackery, unless indeed Mr.

Adler attaches some special meaning to his terms, which apparently he does²

—Review of Mortimer J. Adler's *How to Read a Book*

A NEW CATHER NOVEL

This week appeared Willa Cather's first novel in five years. It is an immaculately written account of a few months in the life of a family in Virginia. The year is 1856. The family is that of sober, plebeian Henry Colbert and his subtle, suffering, tony wife, Sapphira. They live, well supplied with slaves, a little beyond the edge of civilization, within the fringes of the mountains. Sapphira's widowed daughter, an abolitionist at heart, does good among the mountaineers and the slaves. Sapphira's husband, another, spends most of his time at the mill, earnestly reads Bunyan's *Holy War*. Sapphira herself manages the household from her wheel chair (she has dropsy), yearns for the good life in Winchester. Mainly the story is of her more and more elaborate persecution of the young mulatto Nancy, whom she wrongly suspects of [improper relations] with her husband. At her lowest she invites her rakehell nephew Martin for a visit, assigns him Nancy as his personal servant. Colbert and his daughter help Nancy escape, unscathed, into Canada. In an old fashioned epilogue Willa Cather, aged five, sees Nancy's return as a middle-aged woman.

Willa Cather could not possibly write a bad novel, but *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* bears witness that she can write a dull one. This dullness, though, is the sum of many honest virtues: a nicely formed story, characters drawn with delicate authority, sharp, evocative vignettes of Virginia living and landscape. The whole work has the well-made, healthful, sober clarity of a Dutch interior. And like many unexceptionable people who inspire neither more nor less than respect, *Sapphira* is not too dull to be pleasant reading.³

—Review of Willa Cather's *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*

² The *Atlantic Monthly*, July 1940. Reprinted by permission.

³ *Time*, Dec. 9 1940. Reprinted by permission.

SHAKESPEARE ON BROADWAY

Of the performances the best is certainly that of Helen Hayes, and so far as she herself is concerned there is, in truth, very little left to be desired. Her Viola is not only charming and richly inventive, she is also mischievous, and she is dominated by a sense of fun which saves her from the mere cuteness which some performers have made cloying. Miss Hayes is superb in the scene of her first appearance before Olivia, and all through the play she delights one by striking just the right note—as she does, to cite a single example, in the soliloquy leading up to the conclusion that to her the proud Olivia has lost her heart. Here Miss Hayes, instead of being wistful or tender, exclaims, “She loves me!” with an accent of half delighted and half incredulous astonishment. Mr. Evans’s Malvolio, considered simply as a comic characterization, is almost as good, even though his interpretation of the role debases it almost to that of a mere comic butler and therefore seems to me to be not only false to Shakespeare’s conception but incompatible with that interpretation of the play as a whole which I believe to be the best one. June Walker’s Maria is delightfully comic, and Margaret Webster’s direction is highly competent in purely theatrical ways though almost too ready to put before everything else amusing business and mere liveliness on the stage.⁴

—Joseph Wood Krutch. Review of the New York Theater Guild production of Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* (starring Helen Hayes and Maurice Evans)

A HOLLYWOOD “WESTERN”

A number of recent screen epics have cribbed Arizona’s land-and-sky scape for their scenic background, and now Columbia’s *Arizona* gives the state titular credit. This is a satisfying Western—a colorful segment of Americana that is notable less for its narrative than for the manner in which it has been presented.

⁴ The Nation, Nov. 30, 1940. Reprinted by permission.

Clarence Budington Kelland's saga of Tucson of the 1860's, for all its basis in historical fact, adds up to a formula fiction about Phoebe Titus (Jean Arthur), the only white woman in the frontier town. Phoebe's ambition is to make a lot of money and buy a ranch and make more money. In her gentler moments she bakes Tucson's pies—at a dollar a throw. Aroused—whether by marauding Apache or ornery settler—the young lady can be a strictly unfeminine customer at the business end of a shooting iron.

Phoebe's attempts to earn an honest dollar in the freighting business, her highly practical romance with a husky young Missourian (William Holden), and such matters as Tucson's switch of allegiance from the Union to the Confederacy and back again run on at considerable length in Claude Binyon's adaptation, and with only moderate excitement. There are brushes with Apaches, of course, a rousing cattle stampede, and a climax that builds with sufficient suspense. But Wesley Ruggles, producer-director, mostly plays his material for character and atmosphere.

For this atmosphere Ruggles built a sprawling dust-and-'dobe settlement in Tucson Mountain Park and climaxed the furnishings with a 725 foot river (subsequently Columbia presented the elaborate set to the state as a historical museum). In addition, the film's extras are chiefly Arizonans and descendants of Tucson's early settlers, with Pimas, Papagos, and Apaches recruited from nearby.⁵

—Review of the motion picture *Arizona* (featuring Jean Arthur)

⁵ *Newsweek*, Dec. 9, 1940. Reprinted by permission.

The Familiar Essay

☞ TO THE YOUNG WRITER whose highest ambition is to become a "best seller" the familiar essay will make slight appeal, for this is pre-eminently the creative prose type which addresses itself to the discriminating few. But to the cultivated youth whose aims are elegance of style and a judicious audience the familiar essay is likely to offer many attractions.

I EVOLUTION OF THE FAMILIAR ESSAY

This is one of the older prose types—in fact, the oldest with which we are concerned in our present volume. Its real inventor was Michel de Montaigne, a French philosopher who flourished in the sixteenth century. The type was not slow in finding its way into England, for Francis Bacon, the father of the English familiar essay, was born only a generation later than Montaigne. This literary genre, however, did not gain immediate vogue, its only notable exponent in the seventeenth century being Abraham Cowley. The rise of modern journalism, early in the eighteenth century, was what gave the familiar essay its first real impetus. The most prominent of the pioneer

magazines were the *Tatler* (1709–1711) and the *Spectator* (1711–1712), which evoked the best efforts of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele. These two facile and charming writers were the earliest popularizers of the familiar essay, and from their day to the present this type of creative prose has enjoyed a fairly steady if necessarily limited vogue. In their own century, Addison and Steele were followed by Samuel Johnson and Oliver Goldsmith, and during the Romantic period of the early nineteenth century some of the greatest masters of English prose devoted themselves enthusiastically to the familiar essay. Of these masters the most brilliant was Charles Lamb, generally rated as the supreme exponent of this type of essay. All of the noteworthy familiar essayists who have flourished during the century since his death have been, in a very real sense, disciples of Lamb, and yet, as will be explained in a later paragraph of this chapter, the twentieth-century familiar essay differs noticeably from the essays of Lamb and his contemporaries.

This general type of writing must, of course, be carefully distinguished from the monograph or the popularizing article. For example, a scholarly dissertation on the source material of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* or the authorship of *Piers Plowman* would lie outside the province of the literary essay. A magazine article on present-day political conditions in Mexico or on recent progress in the field of aviation would be equally foreign to the main interests of this chapter. For such writings are critical rather than creative, didactic rather than imaginative, their purpose is to set forth knowledge resulting from expert investigation. On the other hand, a humorous defense of laziness or a dissertation on the woes of the early riser would, in aim at least, be a familiar essay.

2 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FAMILIAR ESSAY

It is, perhaps, easier to recognize the familiar essay than to define it, but at any rate we may set forth a few of the distinguishing characteristics of this literary type. And if we examine any considerable number of familiar essays, whether in the works of Addison and Steele, or in volumes of Lamb and Hazlitt, Lowell and Stevenson, or in contemporary issues of the *Atlantic Monthly*, we shall probably note these qualities first, latitude of subject matter, second, lack of conclusiveness, and third, subjectivity and ease of style.

Latitude of subject matter—

It has been asserted that the business of the familiar essayist is to deal with the trivial and to exalt the commonplace, but this assertion would unduly limit the essayist's field. True, Lamb's *Dissertation on Roast Pig* and Leigh Hunt's *Getting up on Cold Mornings* are trivial in subject matter, but Agnes Repplier's *Money* and Edward S. Martin's *Woman Suffrage* are big enough in theme to fill large volumes. The true field, then, of the familiar essayist is not the mere trivial or commonplace, but the whole world. Herein he differs markedly from the monographist, whose task it is to confine himself religiously to the field in which he has specialized. In short, a theme to which the psychologist might logically devote a half-page paragraph might afford the essayist abundant material for a dozen or twenty pages, a theme broad enough to demand three bulky volumes from the historian might appropriately be handled by the essayist in thrice three pages.

Lack of conclusiveness—

With such latitude in his choice of subject matter, the essayist cannot attempt to be conclusive, that is, he dares

not clinch his arguments with the *quod erat demonstrandum* of the specialist. As John Morley has pointed out, the office of the essayist is not to prove, but, "merely to open questions, to indicate points, to suggest cases, to sketch outlines." Thus, Robert M. Gay, in *The Timid Sex*, gives plausible reasons for the assumption that men are more timid than women. Men, he reminds his reader, habitually slink into the rear pews at church or the rear seats at the lecture, women march boldly to the front. A man feels foolish in a new hat, a woman feels superior. A small boy speaking his first "piece" at school is characteristically more embarrassed than a little girl. Now if a psychologist were to answer Gay's argument with the solemn retort, "Rubbish! His method is unscientific, and his conclusions unsafe," he would be missing the point entirely—accusing Gay of failure to do something which the familiar essayist does not pretend to do.

Free and easy style—

A writer who justly feels at liberty to take the world—or any infinitesimal part thereof—as his theme, and who, in his arguments, blithely rushes in where specialists fear to tread, will appropriately employ a free and easy style. Charles Lamb's delectable *Chapter on Ears* would be an abomination if it were couched in the labored phraseology of the doctor of philosophy who endeavors to explain scientifically the reasons why some individuals have a much greater appreciation of music than others. Leigh Hunt's jocular little essay *On the Graces and Anxieties of Pig-Driving* would be the last word in banality if it were written in the manner of an agricultural experiment-station bulletin. And Robert Louis Stevenson's *Apology for Idlers*, if expressed in homiletic style, would be an insult. But in order to understand what constitutes the free and

easy style of the familiar essay, we need to examine a representative paragraph. Let us take the following paragraph from E. V. Lucas's *On Shops and Stalls*:

My own ambition, if ever I took to keeping a shop, would be merely to be in a congenial line of business. Some things are interesting to sell, and some most emphatically are not. Old books would appear to be an ideal commodity, but this is far from the case, because I should want not to sell them but to keep them. Pictures, too—how could one part with a good one? And, equally, how permit a customer to be so misguided as to pay money for a bad one? A fruit shop would be a not unpleasant place to move about in, were it not that it is one of my profoundest beliefs that fruit ought not to be sold at all, but given away. The tobacconist's was once an urbane and agreeable career, but it is so no longer. Today the tobacconist is a mere cog in a vast piece of machinery called a Trust, and the tobacco shop is as remote from the old divan, where connoisseurs of the leaf met and tested and talked, as the modern chemist's, with its photograph frames and "seasonable gifts," is remote from the home of Rosamund's purple jar.¹

This is the kind of paragraph whose qualities are to be sensed rather than analyzed, but the reader will readily observe that it has certain definite characteristics—characteristics which render it as appropriate to the tone of the informal essay as it would be out of place in the monograph or the popularizing article. Among these characteristics may be mentioned subjectivity, geniality, and a tendency to treat the reader as an equal. The subjectivity may be seen in the freedom with which the pronoun *I* is used, and in the frank manner in which the writer expresses his personal feeling regarding fruit, pic-

¹From *Adventures and Enthusiasms*. Copyright, 1920, Doubleday, Doran and Co., Inc. Reprinted by permission.

tures, and old books. The geniality crops out in the writer's whimsical declaration that fruit ought not to be sold at all, but given away. And the casual allusion to Rosamund's purple jar flatters the reader by making the tacit assumption that he is a person of as much erudition as the writer. As one goes through such a paragraph, he may imagine himself in the actual presence of the author, he will not picture a learned professor laboriously dispensing important information from a reading-desk, but rather a jacket clad, slipper shod companion ensconced in a Morris chair, and half jestingly, half earnestly philosophizing between puffs of a briar pipe.

The purpose of the familiar essayist being, then, to charm rather than to instruct, to suggest rather than to prove, what are some of the special means by which he may hope to attain his ends? Three prime essentials of a successful essay are, we should say, freshness, plausibility, and concreteness. Since the essayist's field is the whole world, it does not matter much what subject he chooses, so long as he treats it freshly, convincingly, and colorfully.

Freshness—

There is, perhaps, nothing new under the sun, but men are daily finding new ways of revealing and interpreting things. A genius might write a highly engaging essay upon the subject of *Dogs*, but if he did so, he would certainly not begin his composition in the hackneyed school-boy manner, "There are many kinds of dogs: spaniels, collies, setters, terriers, and so forth." Instead, he would devise some novel and arresting way of telling us that we know next to nothing about these most highly domesticated of quadrupeds. Perhaps he would point out that the old adage "working like a dog" is all wrong—that every

lazy man in town would be delighted if he were only permitted to work precisely like the most industrious of pet dogs. A great essay might be written upon *Mothers-in-Law*, but it would contain none of the platitudes, none of the mouldy jokes which make us grin cynically whenever the very subject is mentioned.

Plausibility—

The quest of freshness, however, may lead the amateur essayist into a dangerous pitfall, it may cause him to promulgate ideas which no sane reader could possibly accept. To assert that women make better bass singers than do men, or that the oyster is a more intelligent animal than the horse, would be sufficiently fresh and novel, but to convince a sensible reader of the truth of these assertions would be quite beyond the powers of the most gifted master of paradox. In this connection, the essayist must constantly bear in mind the fact that he is not a scientist. No Copernicus is he, to explode the Ptolemaic theory of cosmography, no Darwin, to discard the ancient Hebrew tradition that man and beast were suddenly and miraculously created in their present form. Let the scientist prove, if he can, that black is white or that water is combustible, the essayist must always remember that it is not his business to *prove* anything, and that his suggestions will be acceptable only in proportion as they are plausible. A scientist may be drawn and quartered for blasting a venerable theory or doctrine, but later generations will know him to have been a heroic benefactor. An essayist will make himself everlastingly foolish if all intelligent readers lay down his essay with the declaration, "This simply can't be true, it is preposterous. Anybody who would write such arrant nonsense must be worse than a charlatan, he must be a lunatic."

Concreteness—

Another thing which the young essayist needs to realize is that, in the final analysis, he can never be either fresh or convincing unless he is concrete. Bare statements seldom impress, the reader demands that assertions generally be backed up by interesting and colorful examples. It is all very well to declare that the invention and well-nigh universal adoption of the telephone has tended to complicate rather than to simplify life, but this declaration will have little weight unless the writer who makes it is immediately able to enforce it by means of appropriate illustrations. Perhaps the telephone has complicated life, but how? when? where? Let the reader know of the embarrassment that once befell Mr. Blank when he got the wrong number, or of the annoyance felt by Professor Nemo when the telephone bell rang in the middle of Wordsworth's sonnet on Sleep, or of the exasperation which seized Mr. Drummer when, with seven minutes to catch his train, the taxicab company's number was reported "busy."

The following paragraph from G. K. Chesterton's *On Sandals and Simplicity* will show how the essayist may combine and co-ordinate these qualities of freshness, convincingness, and concreteness.

The child is, indeed, in these, and many other matters, the best guide. And in nothing is the child so righteously child-like, in nothing does he exhibit more accurately the sounder order of simplicity, than in the fact that he sees everything with a simple pleasure, even the complex things. The false type of naturalness harps always on the distinction between the natural and the artificial. The higher kind of naturalness ignores that distinction. To the child the tree and the lamp post are as natural and as artificial as each other, or

rather, neither of them are natural but both supernatural. For both are splendid and unexplained. The flower with which God crowns the one, and the flame with which Sam the lamp lighter crowns the other, are equally of the gold of fairy tales. In the middle of the wildest fields the most rustic child is, ten to one, playing at steam engines. And the only spiritual or philosophical objection to steam engines is not that men pay for them or work at them, or make them very ugly, or even that men are killed by them, but merely that men do not play at them. The evil is that the childish poetry of clock work does not remain. The wrong is not that engines are too much admired, but that they are not admired enough. The sin is not that engines are mechanical, but that men are mechanical.²

Now Chesterton's distinction between the false and the true naturalness is fresh enough—so startlingly fresh, indeed, that at first glance we wonder whether it is a valid distinction. Our doubt, however, is almost immediately dispelled by the thoroughly convincing and illuminatingly concrete illustration of the child, the tree, and the lamp-post.

Form versus formlessness—

In one of the early paragraphs of this chapter, we asserted that the twentieth century familiar essay is somewhat different from that which flourished in the days of Charles Lamb. The main distinction between the two is one of structure. Most of the familiar essays of Lamb and his contemporaries are frankly formless, they begin and end nowhere in particular. In fact, their general planlessness has given rise to the statement that the writing of the familiar essay is the art of digressing pleasantly. Lamb, in his essay *Old China*, sticks to his subject for only

² From *Heretics*. Copyright, Dodd Mead & Company, Inc. Reprinted by permission.

the first page, and is utterly irrelevant during the remaining five. Drinking tea from a set of extraordinarily beautiful old blue china, he is suddenly reminded of less prosperous days—days when he and his sister could not afford to please the eye with such exquisite trifles. Almost immediately he forgets old china to descant upon threadbare clothing, gallery seats in the theater, and other accompaniments of poverty, and to wonder whether adversity is not, after all, a greater blessing than prosperity. Whatever peculiar charm this sort of rambling may possess, a twentieth-century familiar essayist would hardly consider it altogether good art. When E. V. Lucas announces that he is going to talk about aunts, he talks about aunts and not about utterly foreign matters of which his subject might accidentally happen to remind him. From the beginning to the end of one of his most delightful little essays, his sole concern is with two intimately related tasks: first, to establish his thesis that the aunt is always fair game to the humorist, second, to explain why it is essentially funnier to talk about one's aunt than about any other relative except, of course, one's mother-in-law. In short, like all other good twentieth-century essayists Lucas shows himself to be ever mindful of a definite objective. Meanwhile he artfully conceals his self-consciousness by emulating the pleasantly chatty style of Lamb. Is Lucas or any one of his contemporaries as great an essayist as Lamb? Probably not, but this is surely no evidence that the new essay method is inferior to the old. On the contrary, the former is much safer for the amateur to follow, for—as every experienced English instructor knows to his sorrow—the average undergraduate theme-writer starts out in the spirit of the joy-rider—the spirit of “I don't know where I'm going, but I'm on my way.” Only a great genius like Charles Lamb, or an exceptionally talented

person like Leigh Hunt, can afford to travel in that manner

3 MAKING A START

In the foregoing paragraphs we have attempted to show the young essayist how to proceed after he has made a beginning, but we have not yet shown him where or how to begin. "With the whole world to select from," the amateur may well demand, "How shall I choose my subject?" The answer may be stated in the form of another question. "What are your avocational interests?" Are you, for example, interested in the behavior of people in public places—men and women and children in theaters, at ball games, in church, on railway journeys, in stores, at picnics, in libraries? Are you a collector of curios? Are you enthusiastic about safety razors, or violently averse to them? If the answer be, "I have neither hobbies nor aversions," or, "I do not know," then the young writer has not yet acquired the very first requisite of the good essayist. Indifference and lack of curiosity never accomplished anything positive, and although neutrality may produce the ideal historian, it never made either a lyrical poet or an essayist. In short, the amateur essayist must take an inventory of his special interests, and then he must cultivate alertness in much the same manner as the descriptive writer or the short-story writer must cultivate it.

If his habitual mental attitude is one of interest and alertness, his most valuable inspirations will come to him unsought—spontaneously. Let us suppose, for example, that you are a connoisseur of coffee. For several months you have been vacillating between two equally delicious blends—a blend put up in a green tin can, and a blend packed in a blue pasteboard box. The eagle on the green

can is as alluring to you as is the grandmotherly person on the blue box, each suggests the supreme delight of your breakfast time. You enter the grocery with a feeling of divided allegiance. Shall you purchase the eagle on the field of green, or the grandmother on the expanse of blue? This week it is the eagle's turn, but you have begun to have an instinctive leaning toward the kindly, wholesome grandmother. There they are on the accustomed shelf—both of them. Which shall it be today? Wait! There are several customers ahead of you, and your decision is postponed. One of the customers, a plump lady with a generous market basket, has just ordered a pound of twenty-three-cent bulk coffee, ground medium. Old Deacon Munn, the little skull capped grocer, opens a mysterious bin, scoops out a shovelful of coffee beans, and turns on the grinder. You sense a buzzing and a crunching, accompanied by a most delectably fresh aroma. Then you observe some ground coffee being poured into a neat, attractive paper bag—a bag of white and brown corduroy stripes surmounted by an enchanting little oval of deep red.

Ten minutes later you leave the store, the eagle and the grandmother alike forgotten. Like the plump lady with the market basket, you have a well filled brown-and-white paper bag with a red oval on it. But you have something more: a half-finished essay on *The Romantic Delights of Bulk Coffee*.

EXERCISES

1 Read a number of the essays of Montaigne and a number of those of Bacon. How do they differ from modern familiar essays? Which more nearly resembles the modern essayist: Montaigne or Bacon? Why?

2 Apply similar tests to a number of eighteenth-century

essayists, including Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, Samuel Johnson, and Oliver Goldsmith

3 To acquaint yourself with the familiar essay of the Romantic period, read extensively the works of Charles Lamb and those of Leigh Hunt Pick out from the miscellaneous prose writings of William Hazlitt and Thomas De Quincey, respectively, the works that bear all or most of the earmarks of the familiar essay

4 Pick out from the novels of Thackeray a number of passages written more in the spirit of the familiar essay than in the spirit of the modern novel Are these passages typically Victorian? Compare them with expository passages in the novels of George Eliot

5 Pick out from the works of Washington Irving and James Russell Lowell, respectively, a few familiar essays

6 Read a number of the essays of Robert Louis Stevenson for example, *Walking Tours*, *An Apology for Idlers*, *Crabbed Age and Youth*, *A College Magazine*, and *On the Enjoyment of Unpleasant Places*

7 With the aid of the cyclopedias, the British *Who's Who*, and *Who's Who in America*, find out what you can about the life and work of each of the following recent or contemporary essayists Hilaire Belloc, A C Benson, G K Chesterton, Vernon Lee (Violet Paget), E V Lucas, A A Milne, Stephen Leacock, Samuel McChord Crothers, Robert M Gay, Edward S Martin, Agnes Repplier, and Henry Dwight Sedgwick With the aid of the library catalogue and the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*, acquaint yourself extensively with the familiar essays of these writers

8 Do you find any marked distinctions—aside from those discussed in the foregoing chapter—between the nineteenth century essay and the twentieth century essay? Do you consider Stevenson transitional between the school of Lamb and the school of Lucas?

9 Write essays on several of the following subjects
1 Cheer Leaders 2 The Saxophone 3 Radio 4 Queer Dancers 5 Dormitory Rules 6 At the Confectioner's

7 Eight O'clock Classes 8 In the Dean's Office 9 In the Library 10 A College Widow 11 A Student "Mixer" 12 Professors 13 Students' Rooms 14 The Cafeteria Line 15 Unprepared 16 A Hotel Lobby 17 How I Read a Newspaper 18 The Majestic Floor Walker

10 Select a number of good essay subjects of your own, and practice upon them

ILLUSTRATIVE SELECTIONS

THE PATTERN OF GALLANTRY

Joseph Paice, of Bread Street Hill, merchant, and one of the directors of the South Sea Company—the same to whom Edwards, the Shakespeare commentator, has addressed a fine sonnet—was the only pattern of consistent gallantry I have met with. He took me under his shelter at an early age, and bestowed some pains upon me. I owe to his precepts and example whatever there is of the man of business (and that is not much) in my composition. It was not his fault that I did not profit more. Though bred a Presbyterian, and brought up a merchant, he was the finest gentleman of his time. He had not *one* system of attention to females in the drawing-room, and *another* in the shop, or at the stall. I do not mean that he made no distinction. But he never lost sight of sex, or overlooked it in the casualties of a disadvantageous situation. I have seen him stand bare headed—smile, if you please—to a poor servant girl, while she has been inquiring of him the way to some street—in such a posture of unforced civility, as neither to embarrass her in the acceptance, nor himself in the offer, of it. He was no dangler, in the common acceptation of the word—after women—but he revered and upheld, in every form in which it came before him, *womanhood*. I have seen him—nay, smile not—tenderly escorting a market-woman, whom he had encountered in a shower, exalting his umbrella over her poor basket of fruit, that it might receive no damage, with as much carefulness as if she had been a Countess. To the reverend form of Female Eld he would yield the wall

(though it were to an ancient beggar woman) with more ceremony than we can afford to show our grandams He was the Preux Chevalier of Age, the Sir Calidore, or Sir Tristan, to those who have no Calidores or Tristans to defend them The roses, that had long faded thence, still bloomed for him in those withered and yellow cheeks

—Charles Lamb “Modern Gallantry,” *Essays of Elia*

FIRES

How pleasant it is to have fires again! We have not time to regret summer, when the cold fogs begin to force upon us the necessity of a new kind of warmth—a warmth not so fine as sunshine, but as manners go, more sociable The English get together over their fires as the Italians do in their summer shade We do not enjoy our sunshine as we ought, our climate seems to render us almost unaware that the weather is fine, when it really becomes so, but for the same reason we make as much of our winter as the anti social habits that have grown upon us from other causes will allow And for a similar reason, the southern European is unprepared for a cold day The houses in many parts of Italy are summer houses, unprepared for winter, so that when a fit of cold weather comes, the dismayed inhabitant, walking and shivering about with a little brazier in his hands, presents an awkward image of insufficiency and perplexity A few of our fogs, shutting up the sight of everything out of doors and making the trees and the eaves of the houses drip like rain, would admonish him to get warm in good earnest If “the web of our life” is always to be “of a mingled yarn,” a good warm hearth rug is not the worst part of the manufacture

—Leigh Hunt “Autumnal Commencement of Fires,” published in the *Indicator* for October 20, 1819

THE CONSERVATIVE TRAVELLER

The moment any one packs his trunk and puts money in his purse to visit lands old in story he becomes a hopeless reactionary He is sallying forth to see things not as they are,

but as they were "once upon a time" He is attracted to certain localities by something which happened long ago. A great many things may have happened since, but these must be put out of the way. One period of time must be preserved to satisfy his romantic imagination. He loves the good old ways, and he has a curiosity to see the bad old ways that may still be preserved. It is only the modern that offends him.

I have in mind a clergyman who, in his own home, is progressive to a fault. He is impatient of any delay. He is all the time seeking out the very latest inventions in social and economic reforms. But several years ago he made a journey to the Holy Land, and when he came back he delivered a lecture on his experiences. A more reactionary attitude could not be imagined. Not a word did he say about the progress of education or civil service reform in Palestine. There was not a sympathetic reference to sanitation or good roads. The rights of women were not mentioned. Representative government seemed an abomination to him. All his enthusiasm was for the other side. He was for Oriental conservatism in all its forms. He was for preserving every survival of ancient custom. He told of the delight with which he watched the laborious efforts of the peasants ploughing with a forked stick. He believed that there had not been a single improvement in agriculture since the days of Abraham.³

—Samuel McChord Crothers "The Toryism of Travelers," *Humanly Speaking*

THE DANGER OF PUNCTUALITY

To be always correct is a dangerous thing. I have noticed that the people who are late are often so much jollier than the people who have to wait for them. Looking deeply into the matter, I realized that Punctualia, for all her complacency and air of rectitude, has lost a great many lives. The logic

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of the thing is inexorable. If you are late for the train, you miss it, and if you are not in it and it is wrecked, you live on—to miss others. I recalled one very remarkable case in point which happened in my own family circle. A relation of mine, with her daughter, had arranged to spend a holiday in the Channel Islands. A cabman promised and failed, arriving in time only to whip his horse all the way across London and miss the train by a minute. When, the next day, it was learned that the Channel Islands boat had struck the Casquettes and had gone down, the ladies were so excited by their escape that they sought the cabman and by way of gratitude adopted one of his numerous children. That is a true story, and it is surely a very eloquent supporter of an anti-punctual policy. Had the ladies caught the train they would have been drowned, and the cabman's bantling would have lacked any but the most elementary education.


Can you wonder, then, that I nearly included a determination never to be punctual again among my New Year resolutions? But I did not go so far. I left it at the decision not to be so particular about punctuality as I used to be.⁴

—E. V. Lucas "Punctuality," *Adventures and Enthusiasms*

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Diction

Diction

 WHEN WE SPEAK OF A person's diction, we mean his working vocabulary, his choice of words. A group of college freshmen, told by their English instructor that they will soon be given an objective vocabulary test, may memorize a certain list of words and synonyms so well as to pass the test with a uniformly high rating, yet the great majority of this group of students may continue to write themes in which the choice of words is lamentably poor. Mere memorizing of words and synonyms, then, does not necessarily make for good diction. Not until a speaker or a writer succeeds not only in using his vocabulary but in using it accurately and effectively can his diction be considered good. In this connection, it may be observed that most of us have two vocabularies: a passive vocabulary and an active vocabulary. The passive vocabulary, which is usually much the larger, consists of the words that one understands but seldom or never uses. The active vocabulary consists of the words that one uses intelligently in one's own speaking and writing. By way of illustration you are invited to read the following paragraph

There is another aspect presented by Literature. It has become a profession to many a serious and elevating profession, to many more a mere trade, having miserable trade aims and trade tricks. As in every other profession, the ranks are thronged with incompetent aspirants, without seriousness of aim, without the faculties demanded by their work. They are led to waste powers which in other directions might have done honest service, because they have failed to discriminate between aspiration and inspiration, between the desire for greatness and the consciousness of power. Still lower in the ranks are those who follow Literature simply because they see no other opening for their incompetence, just as forlorn widows and ignorant old maids thrown suddenly on their own resources open a school—no other means of livelihood seeming to be within their reach. Lowest of all are those whose esurient vanity, acting on a frivolous levity of mind, urges them to make Literature a plaything for display. To write for a livelihood, even on a complete misapprehension of our powers, is at least a respectable impulse. To play at Literature is altogether inexcusable: the motive is vanity, the object notoriety, the end contempt.

—George Henry Lewes *The Principles of Success in Literature*, Chap. I

In all probability, you have not found the foregoing paragraph difficult. Probably the only word that you have had to look up is the adjective *esurient*. But what about *incompetent*, *aspirants*, *faculties*, *discriminate*, *aspiration*, *incompetence*, *frivolous*, *levity*, *misapprehension*, *notoriety*? Have you formed the habit of using these words in your own discourse? Are you certain, indeed, that you *could* use them accurately? Unless you can answer our last two questions in the affirmative, these italicized words are no real part of your diction.

The importance of good diction—

The best creative writers have always given assiduous attention to their diction. To Flaubert, for instance, the passion for the right word became almost a religion. Often he would spend hours on a single word or phrase, and after he had put it upon paper he would read it aloud until he had made sure that it was the one and only word or phrase that would express his meaning exactly. Once, after a visit to Flaubert, H. A. Taine wrote "He declaimed and shouted so this night that his mother could not sleep"¹. Other eminent authors besides Flaubert have labored diligently with their diction. Wordsworth, for example, once spent an entire morning searching for an adjective with which to describe adequately the cuckoo. And it was largely for the sake of diction that Tennyson, between 1833 and 1842, discarded thirty-one entire stanzas and introduced twenty-two new stanzas to his poem *The Palace of Art*, besides altering numerous individual words in the remaining stanzas.

Acceptable diction—

Acceptable diction is diction that is in present, general, and reputable use. Language is a constantly changing phenomenon, but in any given period it tends toward uniformity on the higher cultural levels. In the contemporary English-speaking world, for example, the regional dialectal differences are much more pronounced among the illiterate than among the literate. Mr. Winston Churchill, an Englishman, President Roosevelt, a New Yorker, Mr. Wendell Willkie, a Middle Westerner, Secretary Hull, a Southerner, and Mr. Mackenzie King, a Canadian, would have far less difficulty in carrying on a conversation than would a Cornish miner and a Devon-

¹ Konta *History of French Literature*, p. 428

shire yeoman who have spent their entire lives within fifty miles of each other

Archaisms—

The mere fact that Shakespeare, or Milton, or the translators of the King James Bible used certain words does not necessarily make those words desirable for us to use to-day. Such words as *thou*, *thee*, *givest*, *giveth*, and *spake* are no longer acceptable in general discourse. They are known as archaisms or obsolete words, and they violate the rule that good diction is current diction.

Provincialisms and nationalisms—

Many words and expressions that are current among illiterate and careless speakers in particular regions are not acceptable for general discourse. Such expressions as *two bits* (for *twenty-five cents*), *slick* (for *slippery*), *right smart* (for *a great deal*), *bored* (for *embarrassed*), and *bless out* (for *scold*) are to be avoided for two reasons. In the first place, they are likely to be unintelligible in regions where they are not current, in the second place, they tend to make their users appear ignorant or even ridiculous to discriminating persons. Such expressions, known as provincialisms, are not to be confused with nationalisms that are peculiarly British or peculiarly American. For example, we Americans have just as good authority for saying *elevator* as the British have for saying *lift*, for *elevator* is currently used and understood by all classes of people in all sections of the United States. In this connection, the student will do well to remember that wherever the best American usage differs from the best British usage, we Americans should accept the former as our standard.

Colloquialisms and vulgarisms—

There is a type of informal diction which is entirely appropriate in conversation and friendly letters, but which is not desirable in formal writing. *Couldn't, isn't, won't*, and *that far* are strictly acceptable and even commendable in their place, but they are as incorrect in literary discourse (except dialogue) as a gray sack suit, a red necktie, and tan shoes would be at a formal dinner. The lower order of colloquialisms, known as vulgarisms, are never used by persons of refinement. Into this category of incorrect speech fall such crude expressions as *burstied, busted, could of, gents, had ought, I done, I seen, noplase, want in, want out*, and *you was*.

Slang—

By far the most popular type of vulgar diction, especially among youths of high school and college age, is that peculiar linguistic phenomenon known as slang. Historically, slang is a comparative newcomer into the English language. Its earliest extensive use appears to have been as the jargon of thieves and vagabonds in the sixteenth century, and, according to the best scholarly authority, the word *slang* itself was not employed until about the middle of the eighteenth century. At its best, slang is witty, concise, pungent—in short, the negation of all that smacks of the prudish or the pedantic. But slang is seldom at its best. At its worst, it is cheap, crude, undignified, flat, stale, and vague. Persons of refinement and discrimination do not use it.

CRUDE Old Man Chamberlain sure pulled one whale of a boner when he tried to bootlick that baby Hitler

LITERATE Mr Chamberlain erred grievously when he tried to appease Hitler

CRUDE AND VAGUE Oh, yeah?

LITERATE I doubt your veracity (*or your sincerity, or your judgment*)

CRUDE AND VAGUE Boy, I'm telling you—and I'll tell the cock eyed world—that show was lousy in every way And I don't mean maybe

LITERATE The play itself was tedious, the acting was stiff and artificial, the make ups were grotesque, the sets and the costumes were shoddy, the direction was inept and slipshod

Barbarisms and improprieties—

All archaisms, provincialisms, colloquialisms, vulgarisms, and slang are to be classed either as barbarisms or as improprieties A barbarism is a word that is essentially bad, a word that has no proper place in the language An impropriety, on the other hand, is an essentially good word used with the wrong meaning or as the wrong part of speech Such words as *burglarize*, *yell*, and *pifflicate* are barbarisms for the simple reason that good usage never employs them in any capacity Such words as *clever* (for *accommodating*), *unique* (for *unusual*), *real* (used as an adjective), *eats* (used as a noun), and *suspicion* (used as a verb) are improprieties

Idioms—

An idiom is a peculiar expression, often an illogical expression, which has been made acceptable by usage Many idioms are difficult to parse, and most idioms cannot be literally translated from one language into another Idioms, however, serve the useful purpose of lending flavor and individuality to a language Consequently, the student should not try to avoid them, he should cultivate them To omit idioms from one's discourse is like sup-

pressing one's own personality The best of writers use good idioms freely The following phrases are examples of well-established idioms

a cousin of mine
a great deal
anybody else's (*or* everybody else's, *or* somebody else's)
by and large
catch cold
forbid to go (*but* prevent from going)
had better
had rather
have a mind to
instructor in (*but* professor of)
many a
mince matters
on the other hand
part and parcel
stands to reason
through thick and thin
ten dollars a day
under the circumstances

Denotation and connotation—

The student who hopes to use diction effectively must realize that a great many words have much richer backgrounds than their literal meanings reveal We frequently find that two words listed as synonyms are by no means equally appropriate in a given context—their denotation may be about the same, yet usage may have made their connotation strikingly different For instance, we call Achilles a warrior, but we should hardly apply the word *warrior* to the timid Lieutenant Hibbert or the cockney Lieutenant Trotter in *Journey's End* Wordsworth's Lucy Gray might be a *damsel* or a *maiden*, but Miss America or Miss Atlantic City would surely be something

else To say that Thackeray was a *notorious* novelist would be as inept as to say that John Dillinger was a *noted* criminal In choosing words, then, we must be careful to consider their associations as well as their literal meanings

Verbosity—

Many inexperienced writers use too much diction, that is, they waste time and effort by using more words than are needed for clear and adequate expression It is as objectionable to employ too many words as to employ too few Methods of wasting words include *tautology* (needless repetition) and *circumlocution* (roundabout language) In this connection, also, the student should look up the words *redundancy* and *pleonasm* To say that an object is “visible to the eye,” or that a meeting will be held “at 9 45 a m tomorrow morning,” or that Los Angeles has “a population of more than a million people” is manifestly a waste of words, for *eye* adds nothing to *visible*, *morning* adds nothing to *a m*, and *people* adds nothing to *population* In short, these tautological (or redundant) phrases are loaded with superfluous words To say, “Marietta, which is my home town, is the oldest town that is to be found in the state of Ohio,” is to talk in roundabout language In short, it is an example of circumlocution (or pleonasm) The writer will save both his words and his reader’s patience if he will merely say, “Marietta, my home town, is the oldest community in Ohio” And he will not sacrifice a particle of his meaning!

Triteness—

Diction in general, when it falls into set phraseologies, loses its flavor with overuse The French have a

word for the stale, trite, hackneyed phrase they call it the *cliché*—a word conveniently borrowed and given currency in English by the late George Saintsbury. Among the phrases that have been overworked into inanity are the following

abreast of the times	goodly number
all nature seemed	gridiron hero
along these lines	last but not least
among those present	last sad rites
as luck would have it	long felt want
at one fell swoop	method in his madness
beggars description	opportunity of a lifetime
bolt from a clear sky	proud possessor
budding genius	sadder but wiser
conspicuous by its absence	time of our lives
doomed to disappointment	tired but happy
dull, sickening thud	too full for utterance
exception proves the rule	trees stood like sentinels
fair damsel	wended their way
fair sex	where ignorance is bliss
favor with a selection	working like Trojans
fistic encounter	

If the young writer will make an honest effort to say precisely what he means, he will go a long way toward avoiding such flat, colorless, ineffective, worn-out phrases as those listed above.

Current faulty diction—

A glossary of widely current faulty diction is given below. In studying this glossary the student should, of course, give most careful attention to any faulty words or expressions that he may be in the habit of using.

Affect, effect Distinguish carefully between these two words. The verb *to affect* means *to influence*, *to effect* means *to ac-*

comply or *bring about* The noun *effect* means *consequence* or *result* *Affect* is never correctly used as a noun

Aggravate, irritate These two verbs are by no means synonymous *To aggravate* means *to make worse*, *to irritate* means *to annoy* or *inflame*

WRONG Their shouting aggravated me

RIGHT Their shouting irritated me

RIGHT Their shouting aggravated my headache

Ain't illiterate for *am not*, *is not*, *are not*

Already, all ready Distinguish carefully between these two expressions

RIGHT They have already gone

RIGHT They are all ready to start

Alright a barbarism for *all right*

Also not a synonym for *and* or for *as well as*

POOR I have read *Ivanhoe*, also *Kenilworth*

RIGHT I have read *Ivanhoe* and also *Kenilworth*

Altogether, all together Distinguish carefully between these two expressions

RIGHT Those shoes are altogether too large for me

RIGHT Let us sing the chorus, all together

Among, between Distinguish carefully between these two prepositions In the best modern usage *between* has a strictly dual significance, it applies exclusively to two persons or things

Anxious not a synonym for *eager*

DOUBTFUL He was anxious to attend the World's Fair

RIGHT He was eager to attend the World's Fair

RIGHT He was anxious about his sister's health

Anyplace illiterate for *anywhere* Compare *everyplace*, *no-place*

As not a synonym for the subordinating conjunction *that*

WRONG I am not sure as I approve of the plan

RIGHT I am not sure that I approve of the plan

As **as, so** **as** Distinguish carefully between these pairs of correlative conjunctions Confine the former pair to affirmative comparisons Use the latter pair in negative comparisons

RIGHT George is almost as tall as his father

RIGHT Argentina is not so large as Brazil

Ask illiterate when used for *asked*

Awful illiterate when used for *very, exceedingly, extremely*
Not a good synonym for *abominable, disgusting, execrable, repulsive, terrible* *Awful* means *awe inspiring*

Badly not a synonym for *very much* Ungrammatical after a copulative verb

WRONG We need a new car badly

RIGHT We are very much in need of a new car

WRONG The loss of the championship made the team feel badly

RIGHT The loss of the championship made the team feel dejected

Balance not a true synonym for *remainder*

WRONG I shall be away from home for the balance of the month

RIGHT I shall be away from home for the remainder (or rest) of the month

Because not a synonym for *the fact that*

WRONG Because you overslept is no excuse for your tardiness

RIGHT The fact that you overslept is no excuse for your tardiness

Blame on. colloquial for *blame* (one) *for*

Bunch not a general synonym for *group*

WRONG She attended the picnic with a bunch of college girls

RIGHT She attended the picnic with a group of college girls

Burst illiterate for the past participle *burst*

Bust a vulgarism for *burst*

But what not a correct substitute for *but that*

WRONG I do not know but what his plan is a good one

RIGHT I do not know but that his plan is a good one

Can an inaccurate colloquialism when used for *may* *Can* suggests ability, *may* suggests permission

WRONG Father, can I have the car this evening?

RIGHT Father, may I have the car this evening?

Cannot help but a clumsy colloquialism

OBJECTIONABLE I cannot help but wish that I had seen him

RIGHT I cannot help wishing that I had seen him

Can't seem illogical for *seem unable*

INACCURATE I can't seem to hit the target

RIGHT I seem unable to hit the target

Claim a provincialism when used for *allege, assert, maintain*

WRONG He claimed that the other driver was at fault

RIGHT He maintained that the other driver was at fault

Complected not a synonym for *complexioned*

WRONG Most Norwegians are light complected

RIGHT Most Norwegians are light complexioned

Contact slang for *get in touch with, interview*

Could of illiterate for *could have*

Different than not a synonym for *different from*

Don't ungrammatical when used for *does not* An acceptable colloquialism for *do not*

Dove a barbarism when used for *dived*

Drownded illiterate for *drowned*

Due to not a synonym for *because of* Never begin a sentence with the words *due to*

Dumb slang or provincial when used for *dull, stupid*

Enthuse colloquial for *arouse (or show) enthusiasm*

Episcopalian a noun, not an adjective

OBJECTIONABLE He is an Episcopalian rector

MUCH BETTER He is an Episcopal rector

Expect not a true synonym for *suspect* or *suppose* Expectation always looks toward the future

WRONG I expect that you have been very busy lately

RIGHT I suspect that you have been very busy lately

Farther, further Distinguish carefully between these words *Farther* has to do with literal physical distance, *further* suggests extent in the more abstract sense

RIGHT If you will walk a little farther with me, we can discuss this matter further

Fine ungrammatical when used as an adverb

WRONG He is doing fine

GRAMMATICAL BUT UNIDIOMATIC He is doing finely

RIGHT He is doing admirably

RIGHT He is doing very well

Fix colloquial when used for *mend, repair* A provincialism for *prepare, begin* Colloquial for *predicament* *To fix* means *to fasten, to settle, to determine*

Funny not a synonym for *astonishing, peculiar, strange*

WRONG By a funny coincidence both of my grandparents died on their birthdays

RIGHT By a strange coincidence, etc

Gent vulgar for *gentleman, man*

Get a provincialism when used for *be able, find possible*
Slang in such phrases as *get around, get away with, get by, get his goat, get his number, get next, get wise*

OBJECTIONABLE He didn't get to go to college last year

RIGHT He was unable to attend college last year

RIGHT He did not find it possible to attend college last year

Gotten obsolescent for the past participle *got*

Grouchy colloquial for *peevish, surly*

Guess a provincialism when used for *think, suppose*

Had of illiterate for *had*

Had ought illiterate for *ought*

Healthful, healthy Distinguish carefully between these words
Healthful means *health giving*, *healthy* means *health possessing*

RIGHT By no means all healthy people live in healthful climates

Home not an exact synonym for *house, residence*

WRONG During their absence their home was destroyed by fire

RIGHT During their absence their residence was destroyed by fire

RIGHT The divorce courts have destroyed many homes

Hunch slang for *intuition, premonition*

Husky colloquial when used for *robust, strong*

In, into Distinguish carefully between these prepositions
Use *in* with verbs of rest, *into*, with verbs of motion

WRONG He slipped from the bank and fell in the river

RIGHT He slipped from the bank and fell into the river

In back of an illiterate phrase coined by false analogy with the reputable idiom *in front of*

WRONG His shop stands in back of his house

RIGHT His shop stands behind his house

Infer not a synonym for *imply* *To infer* means *to surmise*, *to imply* means *to suggest*

WRONG Do you mean to infer that I am lazy?

RIGHT Do you mean to imply that I am lazy?

RIGHT Am I to infer that you consider me lazy?

Kind of wrong with the indefinite article Wrong when used as a synonym for *rather*, *somewhat*

WRONG What kind of a book is this?

RIGHT What kind of book is this?

WRONG The situation looks kind of discouraging

RIGHT The situation looks rather discouraging

Lady not a good general synonym for *woman* Use the word *lady* with careful discrimination

Lay, lie Distinguish carefully between these verbs *To lay* is transitive, *to lie* is intransitive The principal parts of *to lay* (*to place* or *to set*) are *lay*, *laid*, *laid*, the principal parts of *to lie* (*to recline*) are *lie*, *lay*, *lain*

RIGHT I think that I shall lie down for an hour

RIGHT He lay moaning piteously

RIGHT The orderlies laid the wounded soldier upon a cot, and there he has lain for two hours

Like not a conjunction, and therefore not an acceptable synonym for *as* or *as if*

WRONG It looks like it might rain

RIGHT It looks as if it might rain

Line a loose and meaningless slang substitute for such widely variant terms as *kind, type, field, business, profession, eloquence, grandiloquence, persuasiveness*, etc. Never use *line* unless you are sure that *line* is precisely what you mean

Loan incorrect, except in banking parlance, as a synonym for *lend*

WRONG Will you loan me your knife?

RIGHT Will you lend me your knife?

Locate not a good synonym for *settle*

OBJECTIONABLE They located in Oregon

RIGHT They settled in Oregon

Lose out colloquial for *lose*

Lot, lots colloquial when used for *a great deal, many, much*

Make good colloquial for *succeed*

Mighty ungrammatical when used as an adverb

WRONG I am mighty sorry that you cannot come

RIGHT I am very sorry that you cannot come

Most illiterate in the sense of *almost*

WRONG Most everybody in town attended the celebration

RIGHT Almost everybody in town attended the celebration

Myself not a synonym for *I* or *me*. The *self* pronouns, correctly used, are always either intensive or reflexive

WRONG Tickets may be purchased from Watson, Brooks, or myself

RIGHT Tickets may be purchased from Watson, Brooks, or me

RIGHT I myself am responsible for the arrangements

RIGHT He cut himself with his razor

Nice carelessly used as a synonym for *agreeable, pleasant*. *Nice* properly means *fastidious, discriminating, subtle*

Noplace Compare *anyplace, everyplace*

Not hardly a double negative

WRONG It was so dark that we couldn't hardly see the ball

RIGHT It was so dark that we could hardly see the ball

Not so hot slang for *mediocre*

Nowheres illiterate for *nowhere*

Off of vulgar for *off*

Only Be careful about the position of this adverb Place it where the reader will immediately perceive its grammatical construction

WRONG I only caught three fish

RIGHT I caught only three fish

Pants vulgar for *trousers*

Party not a synonym for *person*

WRONG Are you the party who called me up last night?

RIGHT Are you the person who called me up last night?

RIGHT Johnson was a party to (*i.e.*, a participant in) the agreement

Peeve slang for irritate, make peevish

Practicable, practical Distinguish carefully between these words *Practicable* means *feasible*, *practical* means *available, usable, useful*

RIGHT His plan is practicable, but his methods are not practical

Proposition a loose and meaningless slang substitute for such widely variant terms as *affair, person, problem, thing, transaction*, etc Never use the word *proposition* unless you are sure that *proposition* is precisely what you mean Compare *line*

Proven obsolescent for the past participle of *prove*

Providing not a synonym for *if*, *provided that*

Quite not a synonym for *rather*, *somewhat*, or *very* *Quite* means *wholly*, *absolutely*

Raise colloquial when used for the noun *increase* (in wages or salary) and for the verb *to rear* (A farmer *raises* hogs, but *rears* children)

Rarely ever wrong for *rarely* or *rarely if ever*

Real ungrammatical when used as an adverb

Reverend This title, like *Honorable*, is an adjective, and it should therefore not be used immediately before the surname

WRONG Reverend Morton is our new pastor

RIGHT Reverend Arthur Morton is our new pastor

RIGHT The Reverend Mr (or Dr) Morton is our new pastor

Right smart a provincialism for *much*, *a great deal*

Same not good as an indefinite pronoun except in legal terminology

WRONG If the sweater does not fit, you may exchange same for one of the right size

RIGHT If the sweater does not fit, you may exchange it for a garment of the right size

School a colloquialism when used as a synonym for *college*, *university*

Set illiterate when used for *sit*

Shape colloquial when used for *condition*

WRONG The pavement was in bad shape

RIGHT The pavement was in bad condition

Slick slang for *effective*, *first rate*, *smart* A provincialism for *slippery*

Smart not a synonym for *acute, intelligent, keen* *Smart* means *witty* or *fashionable*

So not a synonym for *very* or for *so that*

Some illiterate when used for *somewhat* Slang when used as a general epithet of emphasis, enthusiasm, or irony

WRONG My grandmother, who has been ill for a week, is some better this morning

RIGHT My grandmother, who has been ill for a week, is somewhat better this morning

WRONG That was some ball game

RIGHT That was an exciting (*or an unusual, or a farcical*) baseball game

Sort of See *kind of*

Swell vague slang when used as a general epithet for *fashionable, stylish, elegant, excellent, delightful*, etc

That there illiterate for *that*

Theirselves illiterate for *themselves*

Them illiterate when used for *those*

These kind, those kind ungrammatical for *this kind, that kind*

This here illiterate for *this*

Transpire a malapropism when used as a synonym for *happen, occur* *Transpire* means *emit, exhale, or become known*

Unique not a synonym for *novel, unusual* A thing that is unique is absolutely the only thing of its kind

United States, the This name should invariably be preceded by the definite article

Up superfluous when appended to such verbs as *count, divide, finish, lumber, open, settle*, etc

Up to colloquial for *incumbent upon*

OBJECTIONABLE It is up to the Mayor to enforce the ordinance

RIGHT It is incumbent upon (*or* the duty of) the Mayor to enforce the ordinance

Wait on a provincialism when used for *wait for*

WRONG We have waited on you at this corner for an hour

RIGHT We have waited for you at this corner for an hour

Want in (*or* out) a provincialism for *want to get in (*or* out)*

Want that a provincialism for *want (one) to*

WRONG We want that you should do the driving

RIGHT We want you to do the driving

Ways wrong when used as a singular Compare *falls, woods*

When, where wrong as synonyms for *that* or as introductions to noun clauses used as the objects of transitive verbs

WRONG Bigamy is when a person has more than one husband or wife

RIGHT Bigamy is marriage to more than one person

WRONG I have just read where Hitler is making new demands

RIGHT I have just read that Hitler is making new demands

Where at illiterate for *where*

EXERCISES

1 From the illustrative selections at the end of this chapter, choose twenty-five words that you have never made a part of your working vocabulary Study the dictionary meanings of these words, and then write sentences in which you use these words

2 Distinguish the following words, both in denotation and in connotation beautiful, pretty, lovely, old, ancient, antique, ignorant, illiterate, stupid, funny, strange, peculiar,

fashionable, aristocratic, snobbish, foolish, silly, frivolous, insignificant, small, trivial, cosmopolitan, metropolitan, city, town, village, rural, rustic, idealistic, visionary, indigence, poverty, squalor, honest, frank, blunt

1 THE DICTION OF EXPOSITION

At the beginning of Chapter I we pointed out the fundamental distinction between exposition and description. We pointed out that whereas the material of description is always concrete, the material of exposition may be either concrete or abstract. We pointed out, further, that whereas description is always concerned with presenting images, exposition (even when its material happens to be concrete) is primarily concerned with presenting ideas. It will therefore be apparent that concrete words are absolutely indispensable in description, and that abstract words play an extremely important part in exposition.

Abstract and concrete words—

Abstract words name or qualify conditions, qualities, or relations. Such words are *justice*, *expediency*, *incalculable*, and *probably*. Concrete words name or qualify tangible things or discernible actions. Such words are *barn*, *tree*, *swim*, *red*, *grimy*, and *loudly*. Abstract words may appropriately be called *idea*-words, concrete words may as appropriately be called *thing*-words. Abstract words, when used most effectively, are characterized by precision, concrete words, at their best, are characterized by vividness.

VAGUE ABSTRACT DICTION Norman Thomas is too radical to suit me

PRECISE Norman Thomas is a Marxian Socialist, I believe in the capitalistic system

VAGUE CONCRETE DICTION Soon shall we have the beautiful
fragrant flowers of summer

VIVID Soon shall we have gold dusted snapdragon, Sweet-
William with its homely cottage smell

Precise and suggestive diction—

Because of the fact that exposition is generally a much less imaginative form of discourse than description, and because of the fact that abstract language permits a greater latitude of synonyms than does concrete language, the inexperienced writer often feels that expository writing requires less minute attention to diction than does descriptive writing. In this feeling he is partly correct, for abstract words do tend to be more flexible than concrete words. For example, the expository writer might interchange *sagacity* and *perspicacity* almost at will, whereas the descriptive writer must always bear in mind that *scarlet* is essentially *scarlet*, not *crimson* or *maroon* or *vermilion*.

All of this, however, does not mean that the expository writer can afford to be careless about his choice of words. Neither does it mean that the writer upon an abstract subject need hesitate to enliven his diction by the occasional use of a concrete word or phrase or figure. Notice, for example, how dull and uninteresting the following paragraph is.

Walter Scott is by far the best of the romantics. *The Lady of the Lake* can hardly be considered a real poem beyond the fact that it has a good narrative element. It is just such a story as the average healthy man would think up for himself, going through just such scenes as it is laid in. Hence there is an indefinable attractiveness in these carelessly written verses, like the song of the unseen bird among the mountains, hence, even after we have finished the book, we remember distinctly the scenery and adventures and realize the appropriateness of that beautiful title, *The Lady of the Lake*.

Now notice how much more brightly and freshly and engrossingly Robert Louis Stevenson has said the same thing

Walter Scott is out and away the king of the romantics *The Lady of the Lake* has no indisputable claim to a poem beyond the inherent fitness and desirability of the tale It is just such a story as a man would make up for himself, walking, in the best health and temper, through just such scenes as it is laid in Hence it is that a charm dwells indefinable among these slovenly verses, as the unseen cuckoo fills the mountains with his note, hence, even after we have flung the book aside, the scenery and adventures remain present to the mind, a new and green possession, not unworthy of that beautiful name, *The Lady of the Lake*²

—Stevenson *Essays* (Modern Student's Library), p. 232

A re-examination of the two paragraphs just quoted will be illuminating To be specific, if the student will compare and contrast the words and the phrases in the parallel columns below, he will perceive how carefully and skilfully Stevenson has chosen his expressions with a view to apt effectiveness

<i>Dull Paragraph</i>	<i>Stevenson Paragraph</i>
by far the best	out and away the king
an indefinable effectiveness	charm dwells indefinable
carelessly written verses	slovenly verses
unseen bird among the mountains	unseen cuckoo fills the mountains
finished the book	flung the book aside
remembers and realizes	to the mind, a new and green
the appropriateness	possession

It will thus be seen that although exposition may offer little opportunity for vividness in diction, it offers con-

² Copyright Charles Scribner's Sons Reprinted by permission

stant opportunity for precision, and not infrequent opportunity for grace and charm

Less colored by the imaginative than the Stevenson paragraph, but certainly no less effective in its way, is the following paragraph by a present day American expository writer

A number of years ago Professor Veblen in his *Theory of the Leisure Class* tried to point out how the traditions and interests of a leisure class had shaped our tastes and our morals. A quite plausible volume might be written on the thesis that the pursuit of leisure in our civilization is determined by our traditions of work, we carry the morals and ideals of an essentially industrial, essentially business civilization over into our play. Leisure—a quiet and emancipated absorption in things and doings for their own sake—has always seemed to us effeminate and exotic. We wish leisure for relief, for release, for escape, for instruction, enlightenment, or advancement. There is something immoral about moments that are good in themselves. There is probably no other country in the world where idleness is one of the deadly sins.³

—Irwin Edman "On American Leisure"

The diction of the foregoing paragraph is almost entirely abstract, but every word in it has been chosen after the closest reasoning and with the greatest care. In this connection, the student should note especially the meanings of the words that Mr. Edman has used in parallel series: *traditions* and *interests*, *tastes* and *morals*, *morals* and *ideals*, *industrial* and *business*, *quiet* and *emancipated*, *effeminate* and *exotic*, *relief*, *release*, and *escape*, *instruction*, *enlightenment*, and *advancement*. Some of these paired words—such as *relief* and *escape*, *instruction* and *enlightenment*—are partly synonymous, others—such as *quiet* and *emancipated*, *effeminate* and *exotic*—are totally

³ *Harpers Magazine* Reprinted by permission

different in meaning But the important consideration is that Mr Edman has chosen each one of these words as the inevitable word for its particular place

Let us now examine a paragraph in which the writer has used concrete material in a largely abstract and an entirely expository way Here is the paragraph

Most pictures of the Dutch school, excepting always those of Rubens, Vandyke, and Rembrandt, are ostentatious exhibitions of the artist's power of speech, the clear and vigorous elocution of useless and senseless words, while the early efforts of Cimabue and Giotto are the burning messages of prophecy, delivered by the stammering lips of infants It is not by ranking the former as more than mechanics, or the latter as less than artists, that the taste of the multitude, always awake to the lowest pleasures which art can bestow, and blunt to the highest, is to be formed or elevated It must be the part of the judicious critic carefully to distinguish what is language, and what is thought, and to rank and praise pictures chiefly for the latter, considering the former as a totally inferior excellence, and one which cannot be compared with nor weighed against thought in any way nor in any degree whatsoever The picture which has the nobler and more numerous ideas, however awkwardly expressed, is a greater and a better picture than that which has the less noble and less numerous ideas, however beautifully expressed No weight, nor mass, nor beauty of execution, can outweigh one grain or fragment of thought Three pen strokes of Raffaele are a greater and a better picture than the most finished work that ever Carlo Dolci polished into inanity A finished work of a great artist is only better than its sketch, if the sources of pleasure belonging to color and realization—valuable in themselves—are so employed as to increase the impressiveness of the thought But if one atom of thought has vanished, all color, all finish, all execution, all ornament, are too dearly bought Nothing but thought can pay for thought, and the instant that the increasing refinement

or finish of the picture begins to be paid for by the loss of the faintest shadow of an idea, that instant all refinement or finish is an excrescence and a deformity

—John Ruskin *Modern Painters*, Vol I, part I, sect 1,
Chap II (Text of the original English edition of
1843)

In the foregoing paragraph the material is concrete, for Ruskin is talking about painted pictures. If he had wished to do so, he could have described them—as he does describe Landseer's painting, "Old Shepherd's Chief-mourner," in an earlier paragraph of the same chapter of *Modern Painters*. In our quoted paragraph, however, Ruskin is not interested in images, he is interested in ideas. He does not care to make us visualize, he wants us to reason. Only in such metaphorical phrases as *the stammering lips of infants* does he employ the diction of description. His words, however, are as precise, as carefully chosen, as richly suggestive, as if he were painting the most accurate word-picture. Just what is he saying in this paragraph? He is saying that in art he prefers inspiration and philosophic insight to skilful technique. He is saying that the seventeenth-century painters, although much more competent craftsmen than their pioneering thirteenth-century precursors, are much less worthy of our attention, because, although their manner of execution was mechanically excellent, their subject-matter was trivial. He is saying that he would rather hear "burning messages of prophecy" delivered stammeringly (or see great subjects painted faultily) than "useless and senseless words" delivered in an exquisitely beautiful manner (or than see trivial subjects painted flawlessly). He is saying, to be specific, that only the injudicious will rank *Dolci* as more than a mechanic or *Giotto* as less than an artist, for, although *Dolci* was always adroit and *Giotto*

was often clumsy, it was Giotto who had by far the nobler and more numerous ideas as well as the greater spirituality and inspiration

The student may very profitably make his own list of outstandingly effective words and phrases in the Ruskin paragraph. In doing so, he should note such aptly suggestive phrases as *burning messages of prophecy*, as well as such precisely expressive phrases as *ostentatious exhibitions*. He should note, further, that nearly every individual word in the paragraph is a simple word in very common use—that, in fact, *ostentatious* and *excessiveness* are probably the only words that do not already belong in the student's own active vocabulary

Learned and popular words—

This brings us to a subject that is especially pertinent to the diction of exposition—the subject that Professors Greenough and Kittredge have called learned and popular words.⁴ “Learned” words are words that are used and understood exclusively by educated persons, “popular” words are words that are used and understood by all classes of people. For example, *fire*, *choose*, *brave*, and *shady* are popular words, *conflagration*, *select*, *valorous*, and *umbrageous* are learned words. Most of our popular words have come down to us from the Anglo-Saxon, most of our learned words have been borrowed from the Latin, either directly or through the French. Half-educated persons often get the mistaken idea that learned words are necessarily more impressive, more dignified, more exalted than popular words. As an unfortunate result, readers are often beset by “fine writing,” a literary malpractice that is discussed later in this chapter. The

⁴See J. B. Greenough and G. L. Kittredge *Words and Their Ways in English Speech* (1902).

fact is that dignified discourse may be couched either in learned or in popular words. The speeches of Edmund Burke, for instance, abound in learned words—and Burke was one of the most impressive of British orators. The Book of Ruth (King James Version), on the other hand, is expressed almost entirely in popular words—and this book is one of the most beautiful, one of the most exalted, in the greatest of all anthologies.

To test this matter of learned and popular words a little further, we might compare the following two paragraphs, each one from the pen of a major English author.

It has been observed that the most studious are not always the most learned. There is, indeed, no great difficulty in discovering that this difference of proficiency may arise from the difference of intellectual powers, of the choice of books, or the convenience of information. But I believe it likewise frequently happens that the most recluse are not the most vigorous prosecutors of study. Many impose upon the world, and many upon themselves, by an appearance of severe and exemplary diligence, when they, in reality, give themselves up to the luxury of fancy, please their minds with regulating the past, or planning the future, place themselves at will in varied situations of happiness, and slumber away their days in voluntary visions. In the journey of life some are left behind, because they are naturally feeble and slow, some because they miss the way, and many because they leave it by choice, and instead of pressing onward with a steady pace, delight themselves with momentary deviations, turn aside to pluck every flower, and repose in every shade.

—Samuel Johnson *The Rambler*, No. 89

Polonius is a perfect character in its kind, nor is there any foundation for the objections which have been made to the consistency of this part. It is said that he acts very foolishly and talks very sensibly. There is no inconsistency in that. Again, that he talks wisely at one time and foolishly

at another, that his advice to Laertes is very excellent, and his advice to the King and Queen on the subject of Hamlet's madness very ridiculous. But he gives the one as a father, and is sincere in it, he gives the other as a mere courtier, a busybody, and is accordingly officious, garrulous, and impertinent. In short, Shakespeare has been accused of inconsistency in this and other characters, only because he has kept up the distinction which there is in nature, between the understandings and the moral habits of men, between the absurdities of their ideas and the absurdity of their motives. Polonius is not a fool, but he makes himself so. His folly, whether in his actions or speeches, comes under the head of impropriety of intention.

—William Hazlitt *The Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*

In which of the foregoing paragraphs are learned words the more prominent? Certainly in the former. Which of these two paragraphs do you prefer? Probably the latter, but that is neither here nor there. The best word to use, whether learned or popular, is the word that is most accurate in expression or most apt in suggestion. As Hazlitt has truly said, in his essay "On Familiar Style," "The proper force of words lies not in the words themselves, but in their application. It is not pomp or pretension, but the adaptation of the expression to the idea that clenches a writer's meaning."

EXERCISES

1 In the illustrative expository selections at the end of this chapter, what words seem to you to be especially well chosen? Could you suggest the substitution of any words that would serve equally well or even better?

2 Give "learned" synonyms for the following "popular" words: busy, thoughtful, gift, happy, payment, fight (noun), truth, name (noun), show (verb), old age, echo, warning, queer, fat, truthful, meaning, try, lively.

2 THE DICTION OF DESCRIPTION

In our consideration of the diction of description, it will be well for us to examine the several parts of speech that have an essentially descriptive value. Conjunctions and prepositions are, of course, neither effective nor ineffective descriptively, they are simply inevitable, indispensable elements in any kind of discourse. The essentially descriptive words are nouns, adjectives, adverbs, and verbs.

The noun—

Since all concrete objects are named by nouns, we may logically consider the noun first. For our purposes there are, of course, two kinds of nouns: general and specific. It should be observed, however, that "general" and "specific" are relative, not absolute terms. For example, *dog* is more specific than *quadruped*, but more general than *collie*. Now, obviously, the more specific our nouns are, the more vivid our description is likely to be. In this connection, note the comparative vividness of such words as *fir* and *tree*, *marigold* and *flower*, *wren* and *bird*.

For effective use of nouns let us examine the following paragraph from James Lane Allen's *The Mettle of the Pasture*:

A watering cart creaked slowly past the door and the gush of the drops of water sounded like a shower and the smell of the dust was strong. Far away in some direction were heard the cries of school children. A bell was tolling, a green fly, entering through the rear door, sang loud on the dusty window-panes and then flew out and alighted on a plant of nightshade springing up rank at the door step.⁵

—Part II, Chap. IV

In the foregoing paragraph, the student should note especially such nouns as *watering cart*, *gush*, *shower*, *dust*,

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window-panes, nightshade, and door step To find more specific nouns would be extremely difficult

A fuller appreciation of the pictorial value of specific nouns is afforded by a consideration of the following paragraph, in which nearly all of the nouns are decidedly general

One morning Elizabeth walked up the High Street, in no great hurry The front doors of the private houses were mostly left open at this pleasant season of the year, no thought of sneak thieves disturbing the minds of the citizens Hence, through the hallways thus unclosed could be seen gardens in the back, glowing with flowers of various kinds, and beyond the gardens could be seen stretches of stone wall

The foregoing picture is obviously vague and unsatisfying The reader knows that he has just accompanied a young woman through a residential section of an English provincial town But what has he seen? Very little, indeed He knows that the morning is mild, for the writer has just baldly told him so, and the doors of most of the dwelling-houses are open Since back doors as well as front doors are standing ajar, he observes that each house has a flower-garden in the rear But what kinds of flowers grow in these gardens? The writer has been too indolent, too ignorant, or—more probably—too unappreciative of word-values to help the reader to see clearly As for the stone walls in the extreme rear, do they suggest age? Do they suggest decay? Do they suggest contrast to the blooming radiance of the gardens? In an ancient English market-town they ought, presumably, to suggest all of these things, but in this colorless description they suggest nothing Finally, what season of the year has the writer portrayed? It is a mild season—a season of open doors and blossoming flowers But what of that? England enjoys two or three such seasons every year The reader turns

from the blurred picture with a sigh of disappointment. His mood is akin to that of a very near-sighted old gentleman who starts on a sight-seeing tour and discovers—too late—that he has left his spectacles at home.

Now let us observe how Thomas Hardy, a great master of specific diction, portrays the scene which we have just barely glimpsed.

It was about ten o'clock, and market day, when Elizabeth paced up the High Street, in no great hurry. The front doors of the private houses were mostly left open at this warm autumn time, no thought of umbrella stealers disturbing the minds of the placid burgesses. Hence, through the long, straight entrance passages thus unclosed could be seen, as through tunnels, the mossy gardens at the back, glowing with nasturtiums, fuchsias, scarlet geraniums, "bloody warriors," snapdragons, and dahlias, this floral blaze being backed by crusted gray stonework remaining from a yet remoter Casterbridge than the venerable one visible in the street.

—*The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Chap. IX

Thanks to specific words, particularly specific nouns, we get a real picture here. The "pleasant season" becomes definitely autumn, the "morning" is at ten o'clock, the "citizens" are vivified into placid burgesses, and the "sneak-thieves" are identified as umbrella stealers. At the novelist's masterful touch the unclosed "hallways" take on the semblance of tunnels, the gardens are mossy, the pallid "flowers of various kinds" blossom into radiant nasturtiums and geraniums, and the crusted grey stone walls assume the venerable appearance that belongs to them. In short, Hardy has not stammeringly *told* the reader about the High Street of Casterbridge, he has made the reader *see* that thoroughfare.

And yet we must not overwork specific nouns. There is such a thing as being specific at the expense of truthfulness. To attempt to enumerate the varieties of trees in a woodland so remote that it looked blue in the distance would be absurdly unconvincing. The specific word is, in short, not quite always the accurate word. It is rare, however, that the amateur falls into the error of being over-specific in his use of nouns.

The adjective—

This part of speech, though less fundamental than the noun, is extremely useful as a descriptive word. To cite but one instance, the colors of concrete objects can be indicated only by adjectives. In this connection, the word *trout* calls up a vivid image to the inland fisherman, but hardly to the layman, most of us find Wordsworth's epithetical combination, "gleaming crimson-spotted trouts," much more satisfying. The descriptive possibilities of the adjective may be further seen in Charles Kingsley's delineation of John Oxenham

He who delivered this harangue was a tall and sturdy personage, with a florid black bearded face, and bold restless dark eyes, who leaned, with crossed legs and arms akimbo, against the wall of the house, and seemed in the eyes of the schoolboy a very magnifico, some prince or duke at least. He was dressed (contrary to all sumptuary laws of the time) in a suit of crimson velvet, a little the worse, perhaps, for wear, by his side were a long Spanish rapier and a brace of daggers, gaudy enough about the hilts, his fingers sparkled with rings, he had two or three gold chains about his neck, and large ear rings in his ears, behind one of which a red rose was stuck jauntily among the glossy black curls, on his head was a broad velvet Spanish hat, in which instead of a feather was fastened with a great gold clasp a whole Quezal bird,

whose gorgeous plumage of fretted golden green shone like
one entire precious stone

—*Westward Ho*, Chap I

The extent to which this description depends for its effectiveness upon concrete, pictorial adjectives is immediately apparent, even to the most casual reader. Omit such adjectives as *tall*, *florid*, *black-bearded*, *dark*, *akimbo*, *crimson*, *gold*, *red*, *black*, *velvet*, and *fretted*,—and you well-nigh blot out the entire description, you convert a glowing, lifelike portrait of a gaudy Elizabethan sea-captain into a flabby, meager statement of the barest facts.

But here a word of warning is necessary. The amateur is much more prone to overwork the adjective than to use nouns too prodigally. The temptation is very great indeed to bolster vague, general nouns with a mass of adjectives. This is just what has happened in the following passage from a college freshman's theme.

Andrew's home, a small, white, low-roofed house, stood about forty five or fifty feet back from an improved red brick country road. Between the road and the house—much nearer the road—stood a row of stately trees whose dry, brownish-yellow leaves had withstood the chilly autumn winds.

This passage can, of course, be greatly condensed without sacrifice of pictorial vividness. As a matter of fact, Andrew's home was a white bungalow. "Well back" is just as vivid as "forty-five or fifty feet back," and much less prosy. "Red brick turnpike" is greatly preferable to "red brick country road," and "improved" is obviously superfluous. "Tall trees" is more concrete than "stately trees," and shorter by one syllable, and if the trees were "much nearer the road," they probably skirted the road. Moreover, the behavior of the foliage indicates that the trees were evidently oaks, and that if the leaves were

'brownish-yellow" they must have been relatively dry. Finally, "November blasts" is more clear-cut, as well as more compact, than "chilly autumn winds." Hence

Andrew's home, a white bungalow, stood well back from a red brick turnpike. The turnpike was skirted by tall oaks, whose tawny leaves had withstood the November blasts.

Thus, by strengthening our nouns and eliminating superfluous adjectives, we boil down forty-seven words to twenty-eight.

The adverb—

When we speak of descriptive adverbs, we refer to adverbs of manner. Adverbs of place, such as *up* and *down*, of time, such as *twice* and *thrice*, and of degree, such as *little* and *wholly*, belong in the same category as prepositions and conjunctions, that is, they have little or no direct descriptive significance. But the adverb of manner stands in a class by itself, and great descriptive artists have not altogether neglected it. Richard Henry Stoddard begins a poem with the line, "The yellow moon looks *slantly* down." Madison Cawein, in a poem about an old barn, says, "*Cautiously* as thieving fingers skulks the rat." Margaret Deland, in *The Iron Woman*, tells of river water that "splashed *loudly* against the piers." Tennyson describes the song of the Lady of Shalott as "a song that echoes *cheerly* from the river winding *clearly*." And in Stevenson's *Picturesque Notes on Edinburgh*, a bird "goes dipping *evenly* over the housetops, like a gull across the waves." (The italics in the foregoing examples are ours.)

But skilful descriptive writers, almost without exception, have used the adverb sparingly. If the student will examine a large number of descriptions chosen at random, he will probably be amazed to find how much less fre-

quently the adverb is used with studied deliberation than any other word of descriptive value. In fact, he might read page after page of supremely excellent description without discovering one really colorful adverb.

The verb—

Perhaps the reason for the apparent slighting of the adverb is that great descriptive authors generally have made a careful study of the verb and have found that a specific, well-chosen verb tends to render the adverbial modifier superfluous. The student may test this out by examining a brief passage from Kathleen Norris's *Certain People of Importance*.

A dense white fog enveloped the city, and through it the fog horns on the bay boomed steadily. But by the time the little steamer reached Saucelito the veil was lifting and spokes of sunlight were piercing it. In the old wooden ferry building a thousand sparrows wheeled and twittered, the smoke from the puffing engine spread and thinned against the roof.⁷

—Chap. III

Let us suppose that the fog which "enveloped" the city were to "hang heavily" over it, that the fog horns which "boomed" on the bay were to "sound hoarsely", that the rays of sunlight which "pierced" the white veil were to "shine penetratingly", that the sparrows which "wheeled" and "twittered" were to "fly about noisily", and that the smoke which "spread" and "thinned" against the roof were to "go up". Or suppose that in Gray's *Elegy* the curfew which "tolls the knell of parting day" were to "ring slowly and mournfully", that the lowing herd which "winds slowly o'er the lea" were to "go deviously", and that the

⁷ Copyright Doubleday, Doran and Co. Inc. Reprinted by permission.

ploughman who "homeward plods his weary way" were to "walk laboriously." The foregoing illustrations make it evident that if one were to set out deliberately to emasculate brilliant description, he could hardly accomplish his purpose more thoroughly than by generalizing the verbs and attempting to revivify them by the addition of specific adverbs.

The following passage from James Lane Allen's *The Mettle of the Pasture* will show further how strong an asset the verb—including the participle and the participial adjective—may be to a vivid description.

Hardly a sound disturbed the twilight stillness. A lamp lighter passed, *torching* the grim lamps. A *sauntering* carrier threw the newspaper over the gate, with his unintelligible cry. A dog cart *rumbled* by, and later, a brougham, people were not yet returned from driving on the country turnpikes. Once, some belated girls *clattered* past on ponies. But already little children, bare armed, bare necked, *swinging* lanterns, and attended by proud young mothers, were on their way to a summer night festival in the park. Up and down the street family groups were forming on the verandas. The red disks of cigars could be seen, and the laughter of happy women was *wafted* across the dividing fences and shrubbery, and vines.⁸

—Part I, Chap. I

(The italics in the foregoing paragraph, as well as those in the quoted passages below, are ours.)

This is but one of almost innumerable passages that might be cited to prove the value of the well-chosen verb in description. In fact, the student will find that representative first-rate descriptions are generally as rich in striking verbs as they are scanty in colorful adverbs.

⁸ Copyright 1903 The Macmillan Company. Reprinted by permission.

The gerund—

Before leaving the subject of the verb, the student will do well to consider the descriptive possibilities of the gerund and the verb-noun. An admirable example of a gerund of graphic quality is to be found in the following lines from Keats's *To Autumn*

Or by a cider press, with patient look,
Thou watchest the last *oozings*, hours by hours

An equally excellent example is afforded by Frank Norris, who, in a description of a ploughing scene in *The Octopus*, speaks of "the prolonged *clinking* of trace-chains"

The verb-noun—

By verb-nouns, we mean those substantives which, though not technically verbal nouns, designate actions rather than objects. Such nouns appear in this sentence from Kipling's *The Man Who Would Be King*: "Now and again a spot of almost boiling water would fall on the dust with the *flop* of a frog", and in this sentence from Stevenson's *Picturesque Notes on Edinburgh*: "There come up the dull *hum* of the city, the *tramp* of countless people marching out of time, the *rattle* of carriages and the continuous keen *jingle* of tramway bells"

EXERCISES

1 Read the descriptions appended to this chapter, with special reference to the concrete nouns employed. Note especially the passages on pages 208, 209, 212, and 213, respectively. Compare the nouns as to specificness. Where a writer has used a relatively general noun, has he had good reason for doing so? Take written notes.

2 Reread one of your own descriptions. Can you substi-

tute specific nouns for any general nouns that you have employed? Are any of your nouns too specific to be convincing? (See page 181)

3 Study appended passages with reference to the adjectives employed. Note especially the passages on pages 211–213. Would any of the adjectives be rendered superfluous by the substitution of a more specific noun?

4 Apply to one of your own descriptions the test just suggested.

5 Observe some object, and try to get the exact adjective with which to describe the color of that object. (Consult a color-chart if necessary.) Get exact adjectives with which to describe other properties and qualities of the object observed.

6 Study appended passages with special reference to the verbs and verb derivatives employed. Note especially the passages on pages 210–214. Has the writer been particularly careful in his choice of verbs?

7 Apply to one of your own descriptions the test just suggested. You will almost certainly find that in a number of instances you can improve upon your original choice of verbs.

8 Do you find any well-chosen descriptive adverbs in the appended passages? In your study of adverbs, be particularly careful to distinguish adverbs of real descriptive value from other adverbs employed.

9 Write one or more descriptions with special attention to the pictorial and sensuous value of the parts of speech that you employ. Choose from the following subjects.

A View from a Bridge
Trying to Sleep in a City Hotel
Trying to Sleep Late on a Farm
At a Basketball Game, between the Halves
At Church, before the Processional
In a Night Club
In a Market-House

NOTE—The instructor may wish to postpone this exercise until after the class has begun the study of description

10 Make lists of specific synonyms for the following general concrete nouns armor, boat, coin, community, criminal, grain, highway, house, officer, person, poultry, ruler, vehicle, weapon, writer

11 Make lists of specific synonyms for the following general descriptive adjectives blue, bright, cold, dark, hot, large, noisy, sad, small, sweet, worn, yellow

12 Make lists of specific synonyms for the following general verbs of action break, carry, hit, hurry, laugh, make, ride, run, say, take, throw, walk

13 By the aid of your imagination and by the use of specific words, transform the following into a vivid, colorful sentence "Opposite me, on the train, sat a well dressed, comely young woman reading a popular magazine"

14 By the methods employed in connection with Exercise 13, vivify the following paragraph

It was a typical northern spring day The withered vegetation was still in evidence on the sides of the hills Some of the trees were leafless, others, according to species, displayed various degrees of verdure Half a mile eastward the woods were all in bloom, the ground being covered with wild flowers Here, but for the few trees that stood in front of each lonely farm, all was monotonous waste land and pasture The inclement spring wind came up the valley, blowing against the sides of the hills, the little farm animals cried, the water sounded in the ravine below the house, the very sunshine was clear and cold

Unless you are a naturalist, you must, of course, look up enough botanical facts to enable you to supply specific words correctly After you have completed this exercise, turn to page 213, to the last paragraph of the selection entitled "Langdale in the Wordsworth Country," and observe how Mrs Humphry Ward has handled this assignment The vegetation of northern England differs, of course, from that of any

section of the United States, but that fact need not prevent you from writing as vivid and as accurate a description as Mrs Ward has written

15 Vivify the following paragraph

He stooped a great deal, and walked along in a slow pre-occupied manner, which made the busy London thoroughfare no very safe place for him. He was dirtily and meanly dressed, in an old coat which reached almost to his feet. The rest of his miserable attire, especially his collar and his hat, harmonized in shabbiness with his coat. His hair was grey. His trousers and his shoes were so ill fitting that he moved very clumsily. Under one arm he had a case containing some musical instrument, in the same hand he had a small quantity of snuff in a little paper package, from which he occasionally helped himself.

After you have completed this exercise, turn to page 293, to the selection entitled "Frederick Dorrit," and observe how Dickens has handled this assignment.

3 THE DICTION OF NARRATION

As we observed briefly in an early paragraph of Chapter I, and as we shall observe much more fully in our chapter *The Description of Action*, narration is largely a special kind of description—a description of persons and things "on the move." The successful writer realizes that the truly engrossing narrative does not baldly and barely *inform* the reader about happenings at certain times and places, it makes the reader *visualize* those happenings, together with the characters and the settings involved. Consequently, the diction of narration does not differ greatly from the diction of literary description in general. The chief peculiarity of effective narrative diction lies in the great prominence of verbs and verb derivatives that describe activity rather than being or repose.

In this connection, the student should observe closely the words that we have italicized in the following passage from a well-known modern American short story

About midnight the door *flew* open and at once was *pushed* shut, and a gray eyed, lovely child stood backed against it, her palms flattened on the panels at her sides, the draperies of her white chiffon gown *settling* lightly to rest around her

There were already five damsels of varying ages in the dressing room The latest arrival marked their presence with a flick of her eyes, and, standing just where she was, she *called* peremptorily, "Maid!"

Mrs Brady, standing just where she was, said, "Yes, Miss?"

"Please come here," said the girl

Mrs Brady, as slowly as she dared, did so

The girl *lowered* her voice to a tense half whisper "Listen! Is there any way I can get out of here except through this door I came in?"

Mrs Brady stared at her stupidly

"Any window?" persisted the girl "Or anything?"

Here they were interrupted by the exodus of two of the damsels of varying ages Mrs Brady *opened* the door for them—and in so doing caught a glimpse of a man who waited in the hall outside, a debonair, old-young man with a girl's furry wrap hung over his arm, and his hat in his hand

The door *clicked* The gray-eyed girl *moved* out from the wall, against which she had flattened herself—for all the world like one *eluding* pursuit in a cinema

"What about that window?" she demanded, *pointing*

"That's all the farther it opens," said Mrs Brady

"Oh! And it's the only one—isn't it?"

"It is"

"Damn," said the girl "Then there's no way out?"

"No way but the door," said Mrs Brady testily

The girl looked at the door She seemed to look through the door, and to despise and to fear what she saw Then she

looked at Mrs Brady "Well," she said, "then I s'pose the only thing to do is to stay in here"

She stayed Minutes *ticked* by Jazz *crooned* distantly, stopped, *struck* up again Other girls *came* and *went* Still the gray eyed girl sat on the couch, with her back to the wall and her shapely legs crossed, *smoking* cigarettes, one from the stub of another

After a long while she said, "Maid!"

"Yes, Miss?"

'Peek out that door, will you, and see if there's anyone standing there"

Mrs Brady peeked, and reported that there was There was a gentleman with a little bit of a black mustache standing there The same gentleman, in fact, who was standing there "just when you *came* in"

"Oh, Lord,' *sighed* the gray eyed girl "Well I can't stay here all night, that's one sure thing"

She *slid* off the couch, and *went* listlessly to the dressing table There she occupied herself for a minute or two Suddenly, without a word, she *darted* out

Thirty seconds later Mrs Brady was elated to find two crumpled one dollar bills lying in her saucer Her joy, however, *died* a premature death For she made an almost simultaneous second discovery A saddening one Above all, a puzzling one

'Now what for," marveled Mrs Brady, "did she want to *walk* off with them scissors?"⁹

—Katharine Brush "Night Club"

4 FIGURES OF SPEECH

One of the most valuable devices for enlivening a literary composition is figurative language The principal figures of speech are simile, metaphor, metonymy, personification, and onomatopoeia

⁹ *Harpers Magazine*, 1927 Reprinted by permission

Simile—

The simile, which is perhaps the simplest and most obvious of all figures, is a direct comparison of two things not literally comparable. In other words, it is a figure of speech which says that one thing is *like* another thing. The statement "He looks like his brother" is, of course, not a simile, for it is a literal presentation of fact, and figurative language can never be literally true. On the other hand, the statement "Time flows like a river" is a simile, for this statement is true only in an imaginative sense.

Many distinguished writers are very fond of the simile. Says Walter Pater, in *Marius the Epicurean*: "He could just discern the cypresses of the old school garden, like two black lines down the yellow walls." George Eliot, in *Adam Bede*, speaks of "level sunlight lying like transparent gold." Henry Kingsley, in describing a crowd watching a boat race (*Ravenshoe*) says, "Ahead Hammersmith Bridge, hanging like a black bar, covered with people as with a swarm of bees." Thomas Hardy is another notable prose writer who has employed the simile to good advantage. In *The Woodlanders*, we find this: "The western sky was now aglow like some vast foundry wherein new worlds were being cast."

Metaphor—

The metaphor, like the simile, is a comparison of two things not literally comparable, but it is an implied, not a direct comparison. In other words, it is a figure of speech which says that one thing *is* another thing. Obviously a bolder figure than the simile, it is likewise more dangerous for the unskilled writer to attempt. The dangers accompanying the use of the metaphor will be dis-

cussed in a later paragraph. Since the metaphor is a much more daring departure from literal truth than is the simile, and since poetry is generally the most highly imaginative form of literary expression, it is natural that poets should resort to metaphorical language much more freely than prose writers. In the concrete use of figures in general, with the possible exception of the simile, the prose writers have much to learn from the poets. In Alfred Noyes's lyric *Haunted in Old Japan*, we find this striking metaphor

Soft beyond the cherry trees, o'er the dim lagoon,
Dawns the crimson lantern of the large low moon ¹⁰

The distinction between simile and metaphor is at once apparent. In the above lines, the moon is not merely *like* a crimson lantern, it *is* a crimson lantern. Similarly, in *The Daffodil Fields* Masfield speaks of 'the half-burnt moon'. And later in the same poem we read

Life is this
Walking a windy night while men are dying
To cry for one to come, and none to heed our crying ¹¹

Although, for reasons already indicated, the metaphor occurs much more frequently in verse than in prose, it has been by no means neglected by the best prose writers. In prose, the metaphors are generally unobtrusive, as in the phrase "*mud-colored clouds*," which we find in Hardy's *The Return of the Native*, and as in Galsworthy's reference to "*a little rose-leaf flush*" on the countenance of old Mrs. Freeland, in *The Freeland's*

¹⁰ From *Collected Poems* Vol. I by Alfred Noyes. Copyright 1906 by Frederick A. Stokes Company. Reprinted by permission.

¹¹ Copyright 1913 by The Macmillan Company. Reprinted by permission.

Metonymy—

A special variety of metaphor, metonymy is a figure of speech which names an object by one of its attributes, or substitutes the word which suggests a thing for the word which actually names it. Thus, if I call the king "the crown," I am employing metonymy. Noyes, in *The Newspaper Boy*, describes a misty evening in the British metropolis. In the course of his description he says 'St Paul's is a bubble afloat in the skies.' Now any one familiar with the architecture of the vast London cathedral knows that it is not the whole cathedral, but merely the huge rounded dome, which is likened to a bubble. Similarly, when Tennyson, in *Maud*, says, "The day comes, a dull red ball," he is referring to the appearance of the early morning sun.

Personification—

Personification is the endowing of non-human objects or qualities with human attributes. This figure, although not much in favor among more recent writers, abounds in the poetry of the eighteenth century. Here is a characteristic passage from Pope's *Essay on Man*:

How Instinct varies in the grovelling swine,
Compared, half reasoning elephant, with thine!
'Twixt that, and Reason, what nice barrier!
For ever separate, yet for ever near!
Remembrance and Reflection, how allied,
What thin partitions Sense from Thought divide!

Even the more romantic of the eighteenth-century poets could not get away from personification. Thomson, for example, makes personified Indolence the hero of one of his most outstanding poems. And in Gray's *Elegy* we en-

counter many stanzas as full of personification as the following

The struggling pangs of conscious Truth to hide,
To quench the blushes of ingenuous Shame,
Or heap the shrine of Luxury and Pride
With incense kindled at the Muse's flame

Personification, as thus used, is obviously too abstract to be of great descriptive or imaginative value, especially in creative prose writing

Onomatopoeia—

Onomatopoeia, or the adaptation of sound to sense, is an ancient device, at least as old as the poetry of Homer. The peculiar descriptive worth of this figure is evident from the fact that it conveys auditory images by two methods—first, meaning, and secondly, sound. Perhaps the majority of verbs and verb derivatives which describe sound possess an onomatopoeic quality. This is certainly true of the gerund in the passage which is quoted from Frank Norris's *The Octopus* (p. 186). And it is equally true of the verb-nouns in our passage from Stevenson's *Picturesque Notes on Edinburgh* (p. 186). In his efforts to produce onomatopoeia, an author will occasionally resort to the coining of a word. Poe's "tintinnabulation" in *The Bells*, and Noyes's "tlot tlot" to represent the hoofbeats of a galloping horse in *The Highwayman* are examples of this artifice. This trick is not to be recommended to the amateur writer, before attempting to coin words, he should make a thorough examination of the onomatopoeic possibilities of words in recognized use. Frequently the effect of onomatopoeia is produced by a single isolated word, as when William Collins, in his *Ode to Evening*, speaks of "Winter yelling through the troublous air."

Generally, however, the most thoroughgoing onomatopoeic effects are secured through a combination of skilfully chosen words, as in these lines from Canto VII of Tennyson's *The Princess*

The moan of doves in immemorial elms,
And murmuring of innumerable bees

5 BAD FIGURES

So far, in our discussion of figures of speech, we have been concerned mainly with their legitimate use. A little study, however, will show that any variety of figure may become a blemish rather than an adornment to a piece of writing.

Trite figures—

The simile is a comparatively safe figure to employ, for the reason that similes cannot possibly be "mixed." But in his efforts to find a simile that is novel, the young writer may be betrayed into making an extremely far-fetched comparison. To most readers the statement "The moon looked like a big sunflower" will probably be more unusual than convincing. In general, however, the amateur is prone to go to the other extreme and use similes which are hackneyed. Perhaps few writers beyond the eighth-grade age will be so naive as to say "white as snow" or "red as a rose" in a carefully prepared composition, but in theme after theme the college professor finds trees, telephone posts, houses, and even garages "standing like sentinels."

The "mixed" metaphor—

One of the most besetting sins of the young writer is the "mixed" or inconsistent metaphor. The temperance ora-

tor who declared of the liquor traffic, "We must bring this deadly viper to its knees," and the provincial statesman who asserted, "The hand that rocks the cradle will now have as loud a voice as man in steering the ship of state," were not more ridiculous than many a student theme writer. In this connection, it should be pointed out that the mixed metaphor generally results from the fact that the perpetrator is for the moment only half conscious that he is using figurative language at all. In other words, metaphors play a much larger part in our conversation and in our writing than we are likely to realize.

The pathetic fallacy—

We have already pointed out that sheer personification has not been greatly in favor with writers since the eighteenth century. There is, however, a subtle, indirect kind of personification which has rendered much modern writing unconvincing and even silly. We refer to what Ruskin has called the pathetic fallacy. This rhetorical crime is, like the mixed metaphor, a crime of inconsistency. Refusing to go as far as Pope or Gray and speak directly of inanimate nature as a person, the user of the pathetic fallacy nevertheless persists in endowing nature with human feeling. This, declares Ruskin, is what Charles Kingsley did in his much-recited ballad about the unfortunate girl who was sent out into the storm to call the cattle home. The particular line with which Ruskin quarrels is the one which speaks of "the cruel, crawling foam." "The foam," says Ruskin, "is not cruel, neither does it crawl." And he goes on to opine that "the greatest poets do not often admit this kind of falseness—that it is only the second order of poets who much delight in it."¹² In the main, he is doubtless correct about this. Even

¹² Ruskin *Selections and Essays*, p. 117

Ruskin, however, would probably have admitted that when a first rate writer chooses to put himself in the place of a demented or highly excited person, the so-called pathetic fallacy may not be at all fallacious. When Tennyson, at the beginning of *Maud*, refers to a certain dreadful hollow as having "lips dabbled with blood red heath," it must be remembered that he is not recording his own impressions, but the impressions of a young man who is temporarily crazed by the violent and untimely death of his father. In short, the question about this figure of speech is a question of subjectivity and objectivity, and these terms will be discussed later.

EXERCISES

1 What similes do you find in the passages appended to this chapter? Note particularly the selections on pages 208-214. Are all of the similes fresh, apt, and convincing?

2 Attempt a few similes of your own. Make them convincing, but at the same time avoid being trite. Consult Woolley's *Handbook* or some similar work for a list of trite similes.

3 What metaphors do you find in appended passages? Note particularly the selections on pages 208-214. Are all of them apt and convincing? Are they more effective, in each instance, than similes would have been? Do you find any mixed metaphors?

4 Attempt a few metaphors of your own. Carefully avoid the use of mixed metaphors. Can you profitably change any of your similes to metaphors?

5 What example of metonymy do you find on page 211? Would the substitution, here, of a literal prose statement seriously weaken the effectiveness of the passage?

6 Reread several of your own compositions. Do you find in them any opportunities to employ metonymy?

7 Examine personifications in almost any eighteenth-century poem. Try, for example, Pope's *Essay on Man*,

Collins's *Ode on the Passions*, Gray's *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College*, Johnson's *Vanity of Human Wishes*, and Goldsmith's *Deserted Village*. Do you find in these poems any personifications of genuine descriptive value, or are all of them vague and colorless?

8 What examples of personification do you find in passages appended to this chapter? Note particularly the selections on pages 208-214. Are these personifications more effective than the ones in the eighteenth century poems? Give reasons for your answer to this question.

9 Do the appended passages contain any instances of the "pathetic fallacy"? Any instances of justifiable "pathetic fallacy"?

10 In the compositions which you reread in connection with Exercise 6, could you use personification anywhere to good advantage? Try it, but be careful to make your figure fresh and convincing.

11 What examples of onomatopoeia do you find in appended passages? Note particularly the Jefferies passage on page 210.

12 Write two or three descriptions with special attention to figurative language. Be careful, however, to avoid forcing your figures. Make sure that your figures are both fresh and true. Write from direct and scrutinizing observation. Choose from the following subjects (See note above, page 188).

Saturday Night in Town
A Railroad Yard at Night
Sunset on the River
Mist in the Valley
The Flower Show
From a Car Window
A Receding Shore
An All-night Rain
At the Home coming Game
At the Confectioner's
Class Day

NOTE—For examples of numerous figures of speech, as they have been used in English and American literature, the student will do well to consult Frank J. Wiltach's *Dictionary of Similes*

6 EUPHONY AND CACOPHONY

In an earlier paragraph we pointed out that description demands more careful attention to diction than does any other form of discourse. The matter of accurate and vivid diction we have already discussed. It now remains for us to consider euphonious diction.

Euphony—

Before going into details with regard to the methods by which smooth, melodious language is produced, let the student note this general precept. If he will cultivate the habit of reading his work aloud—and every one should cultivate this habit—he will certainly learn much regarding euphony. The only way to test the melody of a musical composition is to play it or sing it, the only way to test the melody of a word or a combination of words is to sound it.

Now what are the principal devices by which euphonious prose diction is achieved?

One fact which becomes readily apparent to the person who reads aloud is that various sounds are more easily pronounced—and hence more likely to be pleasing to the ear—than various other sounds. In this respect the vowels and the liquid consonants (l, m, n, r) generally outrank the non-liquid consonants. *Oar*, for example, is a melodious word, *punt*, a relatively harsh word. To observe, on a larger scale, the word-music attained by a skilful combination of vowels and liquid consonants, let us note the following paragraph from Lafcadio Hearn's *Two Years in the French West Indies*

The more the sun ascends, the more rapid the development of the landscape out of vapory blue, the hills all become green faced, reveal the details of frondage. The wind fills the waiting sails—white, red, yellow,—ripples the water, and turns it green. Little fish begin to leap, they spring and fall in glittering showers like opalescent blown spray. And at last, through the fading vapor, dew glittering red tiled roofs reveal themselves the city is unveiled¹³

Of course the vowels and the liquids are not to be used to the exclusion of the more explosive consonant sounds. They are not so used in the passage just quoted. Even if it were possible for a writer to confine himself to the vowels and the liquids, it would be undesirable for the following reasons: first, unadulterated sweetness may become as monotonous as unrelieved harshness, second, the presence of labials (b, f, p, v), linguals (d, s, t, z), and gutturals (g, k) enhances the beauty of the more melodious sounds, third, the explosive consonants add vigor to the diction of a passage.

A second fact which the person who reads aloud will discover is that an artful distribution of monosyllabic words and polysyllabic words is more pleasing to the ear than is an unbroken succession of short words or an unbroken succession of long words. Says Ruskin, in describing the River Rhone

For all other rivers there is a surface, and an underneath, and a vaguely displeasing idea of the bottom. But the Rhone flows like one lambent jewel, its surface is nowhere, its ethereal self is everywhere, the iridescent rush and translucent strength of it blue to the shore, and radiant to the depth.

Now in the work of so polished a writer as John Ruskin it is hardly accidental that five or six brief lines reveal words

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ranging in length from the terse article *a* to the imposing tetrasyllable *iridescent*, nor is it accidental that the dissyllabic and the polysyllabic words are well scattered, from position three to position fifty, in a sentence of fifty-three words

Cacophony—

A great deal may be learned about euphony by a study of its opposite—cacophony. The succession of *k* sounds, as in Browning's query, "Irks care the crop-full bird?", the combination of *s* and *z* sounds, as in that astonishingly bad line of Tennyson's,

In such great offices as suit,¹⁴

the occurrence of accidental rhyme, as in the newspaper notice, "The Rev Mr Drew will preach at Ward Beach next Sunday morning", and the contiguity of non rhyming words with identical endings, as in the sentence "His address was obviously admirably suited to the winning of a large following"—these are a few of the most glaring varieties of cacophony. Another type of cacophony—a type often considered under the heading of sentence structure, but really pertinent to diction—is the unintentional, unconscious, or ignorant use of iambic pentameter in prose. This fault is painfully manifest in the following passage from Dickens's *Dombey and Son*—a passage narrating the death of Paul Dombey

He knew that evening was coming on,
And that the sky was red and beautiful
As the reflection died away, and a gloom
Went creeping up the wall, he watched it deepen

¹⁴ *In Memoriam* first edition, XL, stanza 5. Tennyson subsequently improved the line somewhat by rendering it "In those great offices that suit

Of course Dickens, being a prose writer, did not print these lines as we have printed them here. But he might as well have done so. As a matter of fact, this passage scans as exactly as many a four-line passage of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* or Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Now how may a prose writer avoid this particularly flagrant sort of cacophony? The answer is easy: he must simply take care to avoid the regular alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables. Beautiful prose has a rhythm—a rhythm of antithesis, balance, and parallelism—but respectable prose is never metrical.

7 "FINE" WRITING

A word of caution which should be given in this chapter is that the amateur must be extremely careful lest he fall into the banality of "fine" writing. Description, as we have previously observed, is a peculiarly esthetic form of discourse, and hence in no variety of composition is the inexperienced writer more strongly tempted to resort to grandiloquent sonorousness on the one hand, or to sheer prettiness on the other. Here is a paragraph gleaned from a college freshman's theme:

One magnificent October morning, when the gorgeous eastern sun bathed the hills in an exquisite flood of gold, and when the squirrels skipped merrily among the fallen nuts, and when all the woods were clothed as it were in a regal robe of purple and red and amber, my father and I drove to the mill at Ebenezer Center with a load of corn.

It is obvious that quite apart from the absurd anticlimax into which the writer precipitates himself, his father, and his reader, this paragraph is in execrable taste. Perhaps this is an extreme example, yet in every set of descriptive themes the college English instructor finds paragraphs

which are only a little less gaudy. The thing for the amateur to bear in mind is that if he will always describe with his eye upon the object, he will find little place for bombastic, high sounding, empty words.

8 AIDS TO THE STUDY OF WORDS

Accuracy, vividness, distinctiveness, euphony, and simplicity are the watchwords of effective diction. "But how," the student may ask, "shall I proceed in my efforts to acquire these qualities?"

As was pointed out earlier in this chapter (p. 172), the amateur writer must first learn to observe or reason closely, and then must find words with which to record accurately the things he has seen or the ideas he has formulated. The importance of close observation and reasoning we have already considered, in this and in an earlier chapter. The finding of the right word is, of course, to be accomplished by two principal methods: first, reading; second, a deliberate study of the dictionary and of special word lists.

Let us suppose, by way of illustration, that an American college student is reading George Meredith's novel *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*. In a single paragraph of Chapter XIV¹⁵ he encounters four or five concrete nouns with which he is probably unfamiliar. What, for example, is a *weir* (p. 208, line 1)? What is *meadowsweet* (line 3)? What is a *copse* (p. 209, line 5)? What are *osiers* (line 7)? What is a *scull* (line 20)? In a general way the context will make it possible for him to guess at the meaning of each of these words, but if he has a really earnest desire to enrich his working vocabulary he will not be content with vague guesses. He will take the trouble to look up each word in his dictionary. When he

¹⁵ See below pp. 208, 209.

has learned definitely that a *weir* is a dam, that *meadow-sweet* is a shrub of the rose family, that a *copse* is a thick growth of bushes, that *osiers* are willows, and that a *scull* is an oar, he has made a twofold gain—first, he has acquired a much more vivid mental picture than he could have obtained from mere guessing, secondly, he has made several permanent additions to his vocabulary—additions which he may one day turn to good account in his own writing.

Conscientious reading, however, is not quite enough. A direct, deliberate study of individual words is often imperative. The exact word is like the precious jewel, the seeker must delve for it. In the first draft of a composition a student may write "The big green farm wagon went by." But in what manner did it go by? Being large, heavy-wheeled, and metal-tired, it went noisily. The student may then look up synonyms for *noise*, and after he has done so, he may reach the conclusion that the big green farm wagon *clattered* by. Now where will the student most readily find the exact word? Not always in the dictionary, for even in the best dictionaries the lists of synonyms and antonyms are not always conveniently arranged. Everyone who aspires to be a writer—particularly a descriptive writer—should have on his desk at least one or two such works as Roget's *Thesaurus*, Allen's *Synonyms and Antonyms*, Crabb's *English Synonyms*, and Fernald's *English Synonyms, Antonyms, and Prepositions*.

How would you describe a mountain? Perhaps you would baldly characterize it as a huge hill, barren at the top, and covered on the side by trees and other vegetation. Bayard Taylor, after gazing with alert and fascinated eyes, and after searching long and diligently for the right words, thus described the famous Mount Ida in Crete.

Rising high above the intermediate headlands, the solitary peak of Mount Ida, bathed in a warm afternoon glow, gleamed like an Olympian mount, not only the birthplace, but the throne of immortal Jove. Immense olive trees from the dark red, fertile earth, cypresses and the canopied Italian pine interrupted their grav monotony, and every garden hung the golden lamps of its oranges over the wall ¹⁶

—*Travels in Greece and Russia*

This is a very lovely picture! But it was not wrought by an indifferent person in a few careless moments, it was drawn by a master who, through patient, untiring, enthusiastic effort, had learned to observe and to express

EXERCISES

1 Read aloud the following paragraph from Richard Jefferies, and analyze the euphony of the passage

The loudest sound in the wood was the humming in the trees, there was no wind, no sunshine, a summer day, still and shadowy, under large clouds high up. To this low humming the sense of hearing soon became accustomed, and it served but to render the silence deeper. In time, as I sat waiting and listening, there came the faintest far off song of a bird away in the trees, the merest thin upstroke of sound, slight in structure, the echo of the strong spring singing. This was the summer repetition, dying away. A willow wren still remembered his love, and whispered about it to the silent fir tops, as in after days we turn over the pages of letters, withered as leaves, and sigh. So gentle, so low, so tender a song the willow-wren sang that it could scarce be known as the voice of a bird, but was like that of some yet more delicate creature with the heart of a woman.

2 Read aloud the passages cited from the following works, and select therefrom paragraphs which you consider markedly

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euphonious Try in each instance to determine the means by which the writer produces his melodic effects Ruskin's *Praeterita*, Vol I, Chap VI, Stevenson's "The Manse," from *Memories and Portraits*, Stewart Edward White's *The Forest*, pp 53-57, Richard Jefferies's "The Pageant of Summer," from *The Life in the Fields*, W H Hudson's *Green Mansions*, Chap I

3 Study several other passages, both prose and verse, with special reference to euphony, cacophony, and good taste

4 Reread one or more of your own compositions Can you, without sacrifice of clearness or accuracy, improve the euphony of any passages? On deliberate second thought, do you believe that you have anywhere been guilty of "fine" writing?

5 Examine the diction in passages appended to Chapter 11 Indicate a few especially well chosen descriptive words nouns, adjectives, verbs, verb derivatives What striking figures of speech, if any, do these passages contain?

6 Study each of the three student themes on pages 216-218 Do you find their diction vivid and colorful or vague and inept? How would you characterize the figures of speech on pages 217-218? What figure of speech do you find in the next to the last sentence of the long paragraph on page 217? Why is it a bad figure? Point out examples of cacophony in these themes Examples of bombast

7 Rewrite each of the themes involved in Exercise 6 You have never met Parson Bray, and it is probable that you have never seen either Grandma Houston's house or the University campus which is described on pages 217-218 The writers, however, have given you an adequate amount of prosy information Now try to enliven these themes, choosing nouns, adjectives, and verbs that really kindle the reader's imagination Use at least one or two good figures of speech Improve the euphony of these themes

8 Write two or three descriptive or expository themes as a general exercise in diction Choose from the following subjects

A Quaint Old Woman
Sunday in the Park
The Old School-house
Grandfather's Barn
A Sudden Shower
Commencement Night
Closing time on Main Street
A Prosperous Realtor
A Sugar house in March
A Serenade
A Radio Announcer
Pacifism, Isolationism, and Anglophobia
An Apple for the Teacher

ILLUSTRATIVE SELECTIONS

ABOVE THE WEIR

Above green flashing plunges of a weir, and shaken by the thunder below, lilies, golden and white, were swaying at anchor among the reeds. Meadow sweet hung from the banks thick with weed and trailing bramble, and there also hung a daughter of earth. Her face was shaded by a broad straw hat with a flexible brim that left her lips and chin in the sun, and, sometimes, nodding, sent forth a light of promising eyes. Across her shoulders, and behind, flowed large loose curls, brown in shadow, almost golden where the ray touched them. She was simply dressed, befitting decency and the season. On a closer inspection you might see that her lips were stained. This blooming young person was regaling on dewberries. They grew between the bank and the water. Apparently she found the fruit abundant, for her hand was making pretty progress to her mouth. Fastidious youth, which revolts at woman plumping her exquisite proportions on bread and butter, and would (we must suppose) joyfully have her scraggy to have her poetical, can hardly object to dewberries. Indeed the act of eating them is dainty and induces musing. The dewberry is a sister to the lotus, and an innocent sister.

You eat mouth, eye, and hand are occupied, and the undrugged mind free to roam And so it was with the damsel who knelt there The little skylark went up above her, all song, to the smooth southern cloud lying along the blue from a dewy copse dark over her nodding hat the blackbird fluted, calling to her with thrice mellow note the kingfisher flashed emerald out of green osiers a bow winged heron travelled aloft, seeking solitude a boat slipped toward her, containing a dreamy youth, and still she plucked the fruit, and ate, and mused, as if no fairy prince were invading her territories, and as if she wished not for one, or knew not her wishes Surrounded by the green shaven meadows, the pastoral summer buzz, the weir fall's thundering white, amid the breath and beauty of wild flowers, she was a bit of lovely human life in a fair setting, a terrible attraction The Magnetic Youth leaned round to note his proximity to the weir piles, and beheld the sweet vision Still and stiller grew nature, as at the meeting of two electric clouds Her posture was so graceful, that though he was making straight for the weir, he dared not dip a scull Just then one enticing dewberry caught her eyes He was floating by unheeded, and saw that her hand stretched low, and could not gather what it sought A stroke from his right brought him beside her The damsel glanced up dismayed, and her whole shape trembled over the brink Richard sprang from his boat into the water Pressing a hand beneath her foot, which she had thrust against the crumbling wet sides of the bank to save herself, he enabled her to recover her balance, and gain safe earth, whither he followed her¹⁷

—George Meredith *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*,
Chap XIV

YOUNG JOHN ON SUNDAY

From the portal thus decorated, one Sunday after an early dinner of baked viands, Young John issued forth on his usual Sunday errand, not empty-handed, but with his offering of

¹⁷ Reprinted by permission of Charles Scribner's Sons

cigars He was neatly attired in a plum colored coat, with as large a collar of black velvet as his figure could carry, a silken waistcoat, bedecked with golden sprigs, a chaste neckerchief much in vogue at that day, representing a preserve of lilac pheasants on a buff ground, pantaloons so highly decorated with side stripes, that each leg was a three stringed lute, and a hat of state very high and hard When the prudent Mrs Chivery perceived that in addition to these adornments her John carried a pair of white kid gloves, and a cane like a little finger post, surmounted by an ivory hand marshalling him the way that he should go, and when she saw him, in this heavy marching order, turn the corner to the right, she remarked to Mr Chivery, who was at home at the time, that she thought she knew which way the wind blew

—Charles Dickens *Little Dorrit*, Chap XVIII

THE SOUND OF SUMMER

Besides the singing and calling, there is a peculiar sound which is only heard in summer Waiting quietly to discover what birds are about, I become aware of a sound in the very air It is not the midsummer hum which will soon be heard over the heated hay in the valley and over the cooler hills alike It is not enough to be called a hum, and does but just tremble at the extreme edge of hearing If the branches wave and rustle, they overbear it, the buzz of a passing bee is so much louder, it overcomes all of it that is in the whole field I cannot define it except by calling the hours of winter to mind—they are silent, you hear a branch crack or creak as it rubs another in the wood, you hear the hoar frost crunch on the grass beneath your feet, but the air is without sound in itself

—Richard Jefferies *The Life in the Fields*, "The Pageant of Summer"

NIGHT IN A LONDON PARK

The leaves browned slowly, lingering with the sun and summer like warmth of the nights

On Saturday, October 5th, the sky that had been blue all day deepened after sunset to the bloom of purple grapes. There was no moon, and a clear dark, like some velvety garment, was wrapped around the trees, whose thinned branches, resembling plumes, stirred not in the still, warm air. All London had poured into the Park, draining the cup of summer to its dregs.

Couple after couple, from every gate, they streamed along the paths and over the burnt grass, and one after another, silently out of the lighted spaces, stole into the shelter of the feathery trees, where, blotted against some trunk, or under the shadow of shrubs, they were lost to all but themselves in the heart of the soft darkness.

To fresh comers along the paths, these forerunners formed but part of that passionate dusk, whence only a strange murmur, like the confused beating of hearts, came forth. But when that murmur reached each couple in the lamplight, their voices wavered, and ceased, their arms enlaced, their eyes began seeking, searching, probing the blackness. Suddenly, as though drawn by invisible hands, they, too, stepped over the railing, and, silent as shadows, were gone from the light.¹⁸

—Galsworthy *The Man of Property*, Chap XXV

THE RISING MOON

Across the moor a sea of shallow mist was rolling, and the trees in the valley, like browsing cattle, stood knee deep in whiteness, with all the air above them wan from an innumerable rain as of moon dust, falling into that white sea. Then the moon passed behind the lime tree, so that a great lighted Chinese lantern seemed to hang blue black from the sky.¹⁹

—Galsworthy *The Patrician*, Chap V

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¹⁹ Copyright, Charles Scribner's Sons. Reprinted by permission.

A VIEW OF MARLINGATE

He sat down by the window, and leaned his elbow on the sill. Gradually the sky behind All Holland Hill was filming with the moon rise, and at last the November moon came up round and dim, pouring a honeycomb of light into the chinked and creviced town. Out across the sea spread a mysterious track that swamped the fisher lights dipping and winking off the Gringer. The sea sent up a solemn sigh, which mingled with the sigh of the tamarisks in the Wilderness.

The southwest gale was rising, as yet it seemed far off, moaning behind the westward jut of Cuckoo Hill. Now and then it came ruffling over the town, with stormy rags of cloud, breathing strange vagrant dreams into the sleep of Marlingate. It seemed to Monypenny as if the wind linked up the woods and the sea—it joined their sighings, it mixed their savors, it seemed to proclaim the alliance of these two against the town.²⁰

—Sheila Kaye Smith *Tamarisk Town*, Chap. I

LANGDALE IN THE WORDSWORTH COUNTRY

When Phoebe, seeing no one on the road, turned to look how near the sun might be to its setting, she saw it, as Wordsworth saw it of old, dropping between the peaks of those "twin brethren," which to the northwest close in the green bareness of the vale. Between the two pikes the blaze lingered, enthroned, the far winding of the valley, hemmed in also by blue and craggy fells, was pierced by rays of sunset, on the broad side of the pikes the stream of Dungeon Ghyll shone full fed and white, the sheep, with their new-born lambs beside them, studded the green pastures of the valley, and sounds of water came from the fell sides. Everywhere lines of broad and flowing harmony, moulded by some subtle union of rock and climate and immemorial age into a mountain of beauty which is the peculiar possession of Westmoreland and Cumberland. Neither awful, nor yet trivial, neither too soft

²⁰ Copyright E. P. Dutton & Company. Reprinted by permission.

for dignity, nor too rugged for delight The Westmoreland hills are the remains of an infinitely older world—giants decayed, but of a great race and ancestry, they have the finish, the delicate or noble loveliness—one might almost say the *manner*—that comes of long and gentle companionship with those chief forces that make for natural beauty, with air and water, with temperate suns and too abundant rains Beside them the Alps are inhuman, the Apennines mere forest grown heaps—mountains in the making, while all that Scotland gains from the easy enveloping glory of its heather, Westmoreland, which is almost heatherless, must owe to an infinitude of fine strokes, tints, curves, and groupings, to touches of magic and to lines of grace, yet never losing the wild energy of precipice and rock that belongs of right to a mountain world

To day Langdale was in spring The withered fern was still red on the sides of the pikes, there was not a leaf on the oaks, still less on the ashes, but the larches were green in various plantations, and the sycamores were bursting Half a mile eastward the woods were all in soft bloom, carpeted with wind flowers and blue bells Here, but for the larches, and the few sycamores and yews that guard each lonely farm, all was naked fell and pasture The harsh spring wind came rioting up the valley, to fling itself on the broad sides of the pikes, the lambs made a sad bleating, the water murmured in the ghyll beyond the house, the very sunshine was clear and cold ²¹

—Mrs Humphry Ward *Fenwick's Career*, Chap II

DECEMBER IN SUSSEX

During Christmas night the weather changed Toward one o'clock the wind veered to the east, and blew down the marsh against the river The cold changed from a pearl to a diamond By daylight all the mists were gone, and distances were close in the snapping air Rushmonden broke out of the fields in a splatter of colored roofs, and the fields

²¹ Copyright, 1906, Harper & Brothers Reprinted by permission

were darkly shaped by their hedges, as if drawn by a child with a laboring pencil. Everything was clear except the sky. A tower of clouds piled up against the springing light, and then suddenly the snow fell.

It seemed to come as a surprise to that southern country. Immediately the wind dropped and there was a great hush. The flakes grew larger and eddied slowly down.²²

—Sheila Kaye Smith *Ember Lane*, p. 281

EVENING ON THE FARM

Now, out on the farm, the darkness was spreading all around. Cattle stood in the big pasture. Tiny pools of water lay dark and still in the hollows their hooves had left among the black, moss filled hummocks in that swampy place. Uncle Ben was still doing chores, but Grandma and Grandpa were inside, and the deep set windows of the rock house made lighted squares in the twilight. Grandma was out in the kitchen setting the pancake batter, with the door open to get the light from the dining room, and Grandpa was in there, in his rocker, looking at the paper and shouting out to Grandma, "I see—" well, that somebody had put up a new barn, or that someone else had got his thrashing done in the Buck Township Items—"D'ye hear that, mother?" The big night was lonely around the place. Grandma and Grandpa looked at the paper a while and went to bed. And then, through the open window in his own little room, would come the chorus of frogs from that low place across the road in the meadow that was swathed in mist—"Hmmmmmmm hmmmmmmmmmmmm," always the same, just on two notes, up down, a low vibrating, sorrowful music that seemed as if it was the night singing to itself, the dark blind roads, the dark wide pastures, the black fir trees out in the grove.²³

—Ruth Suckow *The Folks*, Chap. I

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²³ Copyright, 1934, Farrar & Rinehart, Inc. Reprinted by permission.

POETRY AND THE HOMERIC AGE

It is an observation at first sight melancholy but in the end, perhaps, enlightening, that the earliest poets are the most ideal, and that primitive ages furnish the most heroic characters and have the clearest vision of a perfect life. The Homeric times must have been full of ignorance and suffering. In those little barbaric towns, in those camps and farms, in those shipyards, there must have been much insecurity and superstition. That age was singularly poor in all that concerns the convenience of life and the entertainment of the mind with arts and sciences. Yet it had a sense for civilization. That machinery of life which men were beginning to devise appealed to them as poetical, they knew its ultimate justification and studied its incipient processes with delight. The poetry of that simple and ignorant age was, accordingly, the sweetest and sanest that the world has known, the most faultless in taste, and the most even and lofty in inspiration. Without lacking variety and homeliness, it bathed all things human in the golden light of morning, it clothed sorrow in a kind of majesty, instinct with both self control and heroic frankness. Nowhere else can we find so noble a rendering of human nature, so spontaneous a delight in life, so uncompromising a dedication to beauty, and such a gift for seeing beauty in everything. Homer, the first of poets, was also the best and the most poetical.²⁴

—George Santayana *The Poetry of Barbarism*

THE PASSING OF OLD EUROPE

Among the things that would have seemed incredible as late as ten years ago is the vanishing of Europe as a combination Nirvana and happy hunting ground for educated or semi-educated Americans. Certainly if the Nazis win (and even

²⁴ Copyright, 1900, Charles Scribner's Sons. Reprinted by permission.

wore a long-tailed black coat which looked as if it had seen much better days. He walked heavily, his big shoes making a squeaking sound at every step.

"Come on, sinners!" he would say in a loud voice at the close of every sermon. "Come up and make the good confession while we sing this next verse. This may be your last chance—your last, last chance. This very night you may go to meet your God. If you die unbaptized, you will suffer eternal torture. The Good Book says so." And then for emphasis he would hit the pulpit with his big fist.

—Student's theme

GRANDMA HOUSTON'S PLACE

My Grandma Houston had what I used to consider the dearest place in the world. It was a little old frame house just four blocks from the main business section of Akron. When it was built, away back in 1850, it was a cozy farm-house just outside the village, but due to the rapid growth of Akron, it was almost in the heart of the city when I first knew it. In fact, it stood between a thriving chain grocery and a big brick apartment house four stories high, making it seem strangely out of place. Just across the street was one of the fire company's biggest engine-houses. Grandma's place was a darling little cottage a story and a half high, with low bedrooms like a modern bungalow. In the front yard were two rose bushes which were always in bloom when I went to Akron to visit at the end of each school year. In the back yard was a garden of fragrant flowers, of which I remember the sweet peas in particular. The old place was indeed a rural cottage forced out of its true setting by the march of the ruthless hand of progress. How very strange it seemed when a noisy street-car went by, or when the fire-gong emitted its loud sound, calling the men of the nearby enginehouse to action.

Alas! Grandma Houston's place is no more. After the war it was torn down to make room for an addition to the big apartment house.

—Student's theme

THE UNIVERSITY CAMPUS

Entering the north gateway of the Campus, I saw stretching before me a wide brick walk, which had a very gradual rise in it. Far beyond me, I could see another walk meeting the first at right angles. On either side of the walk was a row of trees extending their branches, like old friends, toward each other as if to embrace. Their leaves formed a cool, green arch over the students on their way from class. Many other trees stood here and there on either side of the first two rows. Their leaves rustled and murmured with a sad, sweet sound as if they had a secret to tell.

Directly in front of me at the end of the walk was Cutler Hall, a square, white, many windowed building, which I could see beyond the tree trunks. To the left, I saw East Wing, a white rectangular building of an old appearance. A little beyond East Wing, I saw Ellis Hall with its dark red brick walls, its bright red roof, and its white water pipes. Between these two buildings and slightly in front was a rack holding some pretty pink roses. Over on a little knoll to the east, was the sundial, which, no doubt, could have told us some interesting stories of various meetings that had occurred there.


On toward the right, I saw West Wing, which was like East Wing in style. Back of West Wing and slightly to the right could be seen a part of Ewing Hall. The broad entrance appeared to make all welcome to its interior of learning.

—Student's theme

PART III

The Art of Description

Why Study Description?

 DESCRIPTION IS SOMETIMES thought of too narrowly. It is sometimes thought of as being the type of discourse which is concerned particularly with the appearance of things in repose, such as persons, rooms, houses, and landscapes, or, if the things described happen to be in motion, with the colorful and picturesque side of them. Typical illustrations of the latter kind are the descriptions of the jostling throngs of people in a park or a city street and of huge engines puffing through tunnels of smoke into a dimly lighted station at night. In such instances, the distinction is usually made that, even though the objects be moving and even though the movement may impart an additional interest, the beholder is more concerned with the *appearance* of the scene than he is with the action involved in it. Description of things in repose and of things in motion with the emphasis on the appearance will be considered at length in this book (Chapter 11). But description has a broader significance.

1. RELATION OF DESCRIPTION TO NARRATION

Description is to be extended to all the world of action and is not to be limited to persons and objects in repose or

to occasional scenes where the objects are picturesquely moving. Action is a phenomenon of the external world and, as such, can be perceived only through the senses, can be manifested only by its effects on the senses. Action *in the abstract* cannot be perceived. The material thing is always behind it, and the persons and objects connected with the most rapid action are perceived by the selfsame senses by which they are perceived when they are in repose. Description, which, as we shall see in the next chapter, is the art of recording sense impressions, must not be thought of as applying only to the set descriptions of persons and of places occurring conspicuously at the beginning of novels and of short stories, but as applying to the action itself after the narrative is well under way.

Let us see how description applies to narration after the action starts and the plot thickens. In the most interesting part of a novel the characters engage in dramatic conversations and perform significant deeds. This conversation and these deeds must be given the clarity and vividness of actual life, must seem like actual life. In life, one intently observes the appearance of a person during a significant conversation or during the period when that person is engaged in some important action. By his gestures, by his facial expression, by the intonation of his voice, by the clothes he wears, by the personal possessions he has, one judges his motives, his honesty, his vindictiveness, his relentlessness, his likelihood to succeed or fail, and a thousand and one other characteristics and probabilities. Furthermore, in a crucial situation like a fight, or the deciding moment of a close athletic contest, or a struggle where disaster or death seems to impend, or a sudden catastrophe, the observer's excitement, his joy, his pity, his anger, or his horror is influenced

by the appearance of the scene As it is in real life, so it is in fiction The writer must supply the scenes of life The reader must be reached and stirred by *pictures* of persons under stress at significant moments and by *pictures* of significant events

In the following passage, for example, the reader gets the sensations of a young woman whose highly perturbed state of mind contrasts strikingly with the calm surroundings of an English draper's shop (dry goods store) in which she happens to be at the moment

Elizabeth felt that she must break the silence She stopped at a counter A pale faced, weary looking woman with pincenez attended to her

"Excuse me" (and Elizabeth found that she too was lowering her voice), "I wanted some cherry colored ribbon—"

The woman produced spools of ribbons

"What a horrible day, is it not? I am sure I don't know what our climate is coming to"

"Yes, isn't it dreadful?"

A man with a broad back, his head bent, was walking up the stairs to the next floor

"I think," she said, "I'd better bring a piece of the stuff to match the ribbon with If I may—tomorrow—"

She hurried towards the staircase She knew that the woman with the pincenez was watching her But when she reached the next floor there was no man there but only the costume department, models with waxen faces, fur coats, sports costumes Against the black sky that lowered beyond the high windows two models of young women with jet black hair and ghastly faces of shining wax stared at one another relentlessly There was no one there Nothing moved Not a sound to be heard save the stealthy footsteps of those passing up the stairs beyond

The models stared at her like the images of the dead She thought that one yellow head bent ever so slightly The neck twisted and the lips moved

Anything was safer than this Even home

Then she heard the Cathedral bells begin to ring for Even-song, and at the same time rain began to fall again, spattering the windows with little sharp spiteful flicks The bells sounded very loud in that long room inhabited only by the wax models She knew the chimes by heart, of course, and very often she had thought them friendly, reassuring But now the very idea of the Cathedral was horrible to her, and alone there with those electric shining waxen faces she seemed to see for the first time that the Cathedral had been responsible for all these events—for Uncle Michael's coming to Polchester, her father's death, the misfortunes of the Pageant, the recent "nerves" of the whole town¹

—Hugh Walpole *The Inquisitor*, pp 426-427

Thus description is an inherent part of narration throughout its entire course—not only in the formal descriptions of persons and places, but in dramatic dialogue and in the climax of the action

The present explanation of the relation of description to narration is only preliminary The ideas so briefly presented here will be set forth in detail later (see Chapter 12) There are other aspects to be considered For instance, narration is concerned not only with physical phenomena but with the mental and spiritual characteristics of the personages In so far as the writer concerns himself with this inner world in contrast to the world of sense he is expository, not descriptive But into this aspect of the problem we shall not enter here The point which we wish to emphasize at this time is that *the narrative writer must learn to describe before he can narrate* The failure to appeal to the senses is precisely what makes the inexperienced writer of fiction so often dull and insipid

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2 STUDY OF DESCRIPTION AN AID TO LITERARY APPRECIATION

We have thus far been considering the *writing* of description. It may further be said that a careful study of the descriptive technique should assist the student in *reading* literature. In the first place it should increase his appreciation of poetry. The best poets from Homer to Masfield have been profoundly interested in the external world and in picturing it in their poetry. The poems of such great authors as Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Keats, Wordsworth, and Tennyson, if we may mention only a few, abound in splendid descriptions. The descriptive element in *The Eve of Saint Agnes* by Keats and in *The Palace of Art* by Tennyson is the very stuff and substance of the poems. In fact, the presentation of images, of pictures, is essential to the life of poetry. Poets are continually reaching their larger ends through the medium of description. The inexperienced reader who approaches poetry with blunted perceptions runs the risk of only dimly seeing the world of the poet, or even of not seeing it at all.

Likewise the reader may fail to live in the world that the novelist has taken the pains to build for him. George Eliot, Rudyard Kipling, Thomas Hardy, Joseph Conrad, and other noted writers of fiction, have considered it vital to the success of their work to be highly descriptive. Hasty and careless readers never really see the characters in books as men and women face to face, or the environment where these characters live, or the spiritual struggles through which they pass, or the deeds which they perform. Such readers go into the author's world blindfolded. A realization of the importance of description and an understanding of its technique should lead to the acquirement or to a sharpening of the literary vision, a

vision as important in the world of books as are the actual eyes in the everyday world

3 STUDY OF DESCRIPTION AN AID TO THE ENJOYMENT OF LIFE

Apart from its importance in relation to reading and writing, a study of description should make the student more interested in life itself because it should make him more observant and should stimulate his pleasure in external phenomena. The human face and figure in repose and in animation should become of increasing interest. Human environment and human performances should be observed with pleasure and discernment. Hitherto hidden beauties in animals, flowers, and landscapes should be revealed. One should learn that through a minute and detailed study of appearances he may come to appreciate more fully the meaning of human character and the meaning even of life itself. The world of appearances feeds the world of ideas. The diverse philosophies of Wordsworth and of Thomas Hardy were fostered by their contemplation of external nature. Furthermore, interest in the kindred arts should be quickened by a sympathetic study of the descriptive technique. The actor's art in the moving pictures and on the legitimate stage, dealing as it does with human appearances under excitement and stress, should be made more enjoyable. The sound of the human voice and of melodious instruments should strike the ear more sensitively. The work of the painter and the sculptor should be observed with greater pleasure and understanding. In brief, an intensive study of description should make the student more sensitive to all the sights, sounds, and other sense impressions of the external world.

Why is it that a pen picture or the painted picture is likely to be more interesting to the average reader or

observer than what it represents? Is it not, for one reason, that the artist after a careful selective process has suppressed the unimportant details, has emphasized the salient and appealing aspects, and has given his own interpretation to the whole? After a careful study of the descriptive technique and after a careful study of the descriptions of the master craftsmen, the student should catch some of the spirit of the thing. He should learn, in looking at life, to do his own suppressing of the unimportant, to do his own emphasizing of the significant, and to do his own interpreting. Thus he should come to find in the appearance of the world about him an interest as absorbing as the intelligent reader has in books.

Even here, however, in this extension of the subject from the writer to the observer of life, we are not, of course, getting away from the writing of description. The successful writer is necessarily one who has the power, either natural or acquired, to look upon life with open eyes. In the following paragraph the author has surely caught the details best calculated to produce a distinctive and memorable picture. Just as surely he has omitted innumerable details of no significance—details that could add nothing but confusion to the picture.

A deputation waited upon her, knocked at the door through which no visitor had passed since she ceased giving china painting lessons eight or ten years earlier. They were admitted by the old Negro into a dim hall from which a stairway mounted into still more shadow. It smelled of dust and disuse—a close, dank smell. The Negro led them into the parlor. It was furnished in heavy, leather covered furniture. When the Negro opened the blinds of one window, they could see that the leather was cracked, and when they sat down, a faint dust rose sluggishly about their thighs, spinning with slow motes in a single sun-ray. On a tarnished gilt easel be-


fore the fireplace stood a crayon portrait of Miss Emily's father.²

—William Faulkner "A Rose for Emily"

As one acquires the power to detect the significant details in the conglomerate sweep and rush of life, he is likely to be seized with the desire to give artistic expression to his discoveries

²*Forum* April 1930 Reprinted in *These Thirteen* Copyright 1931 Jonathan Cape & Robert Ballou Inc New York Reprinted by permission

The Materials of Description

 HOW SHALL WE DEFINE description? Etymologically, as all students of Latin know, description is “a writing about.” But this definition is obviously altogether too broad for modern purposes. Whenever we write at all, we necessarily write about something. When we write exposition, we write about ideas or abstract qualities. Exposition, however, is very different from description. We must therefore find a much closer, much more accurate definition for description. “Description,” says Professor Genung, “is the portrayal of concrete objects by means of language.”¹ Perhaps it would be still more accurate to say that description is the spoken or written record of a sensation or a group of sensations.

Sensation—

Now what is a sensation? It would be difficult to find a more elucidating statement than that of Professor J. Mark Baldwin, who asserts that sensations are “phenomena which result within the mind immediately from

¹ Genung *Practical Elements of Rhetoric*, p. 326

impressions upon the senses" ² When I look out of my window I get one kind of sensation, when I hear the roar of thunder I get another, when I eat a chocolate drop, a third, when I place a rose to my nostrils, a fourth, when I put my hand upon a cake of ice, a fifth. In other words, I get sensations only as I see, hear, taste, smell, or feel. An organized record, either written or oral, of any or all of these varieties of sensations is a description.

Description is an art—just as truly an art as painting or music. But description differs from all the other arts in this important particular: its appeal is indirect. The painter, of course, appeals directly to the sense of sight, the musician, to the sense of hearing, the chef, to the sense of taste, the perfumer, to the sense of smell, and so on. As for the descriptive writer or speaker, he appeals to any or all of the senses, but not directly, rather, through the medium of the imagination.

1 DESCRIPTION VERSUS PAINTING AND MUSIC

This indirectness of appeal may seem to place the writer at a distinct disadvantage in comparison with the other artists. In the presentation of outline and color, for instance, he can never hope to compete with the painter. No vocabulary, however rich, avails to depict the shape of a leaf or a bough with one tithe the accuracy attained by a few deft strokes of pencil or brush. Any competent painter, by a skilful blending of colors, can portray autumn foliage with infinitely nicer precision than can the greatest descriptive writer. Any musician can delight the ear with countless tones for which no descriptive words exist. This being true, the writer should not enter into hopeless competition with the painter or other artist. This does not mean that he should cease trying to do the things

² Baldwin "Sensation" *Universal Cyclopaedia*, vol. X, p. 425

which the painter or other artist can do, but he should make every effort to augment his employment of outline and color and sound with numerous devices—numerous and highly varied sensory appeals—which neither the painter nor the musician can use to any appreciable advantage, if at all

Strictly speaking, the painter can appeal only to the sense of sight, and then only through outline and color. He can, of course, *suggest* other sensations, but since his essential function, his special province, is the making of a direct sensory appeal, it will hardly be denied that as a rule his necessarily indirect suggestions of motion, sound, odor, taste, and feeling are relatively feeble. For example, in viewing Sir David Wilkie's famous painting, *The Blind Fiddler*, we sense dimly the playing of some air—but what air? The writer, by the use of a single word, could answer a question which it is beyond the power of the painter to answer.

Even more limited is the province of the musician. He may run the gamut of the auditory appeal, but this is practically all that he can do of a purely sensory nature. To be sure, great music has a stronger emotional appeal than anything which may be placed upon canvas or upon the printed page. When I hear a first-rate orchestra render one of the symphonies of Beethoven, I am thrilled more deeply than I have ever been thrilled by any painting or any descriptive paragraph. Perhaps I may be swept by a flood of memories—memories, it may be, which glow with recollected images as varied as they are beautiful. But such images are mine, not the musician's, and the thrills that you may get from the same rendition of the majestic symphony are likely to evoke imagery as different from mine as from the composer's, as different from the composer's as from the trumpeter's or the violinist's.

2 NECESSITY FOR VARIETY OF SENSATIONS

To the outline and color of the painter, to the sound of the musician, the writer can add the sensations of motion, odor, taste, and feeling. In this connection, let us notice the following descriptive theme, written by a college freshman.

The main street of my home town is just what you might expect in a village of a thousand inhabitants. The buildings all are low, none of them being more than three stories in height. Most of them are wooden, but the Masonic Temple, which contains the largest dry goods store in town, is built of red brick, and the new Farmers' State Bank is of buff colored brick. Between the Temple and the bank there is a furniture store with a very pretty window display. At the end of the business section there is an old dilapidated blacksmith shop. Across the street from the blacksmith shop there is a grist mill, and next to the mill is a garage and filling station. The garage is the brightest looking place on the street, for it has a new coat of white paint. The whole business section of Main Street has iron hitching rails, but these are seldom used, for the flivver has largely supplanted the old nag. The business part of Main Street is paved with brick, the rest is dirt road.

With weaknesses of diction, sentence structure, and organization of details, we are not here concerned. Our sole purpose in considering the above theme is to point out the fact that it is totally lacking in variety of sensations. Naturally, the amateur descriptive writer who appeals to only one sense will appeal to the sense of sight. The obvious reason for this is that visual images, more than any other kind of image, are intimately related to objects, and are, therefore, more readily conveyed by means of language. In other words, I can tell you much more

adequately about a white garage which I have seen than about any sound or any odor emanating from that garage, for every object has its definite name, whereas there are innumerable sounds and odors which must remain forever nameless. Right here, however, lies the very pitfall into which our youthful describer of Main Street has stumbled. Main Street, as depicted in his theme, is as utterly lifeless as Goldsmith's *Sweet Auburn*. It has its full complement of buildings, but apparently no people. There is a blacksmith shop, but no clinking anvil, a grist mill, but no sound of grinding, no odor of feed, a garage and filling station, but no scent of gasoline, automobiles, but no purring of engines, no honking of horns. In short, the above description contains absolutely nothing that a painter could not depict, and depict far better than any writer.

To say, however, that the descriptive writer should avoid putting himself into futile competition with the painter is merely to state the matter negatively. There are positive reasons why he should seek the greatest variety of sensations. He should escape the monotony of a single kind of sense-appeal. He should vary his appeal for the reason that he alone, of all the creative artists, has the opportunity of doing so. He should constantly bear in mind that no man lives by sight alone—that there are countless images which are not visual. Sound words are especially valuable, for the one kind of image that words can truly imitate is the auditory image. Odor is peculiarly impressive in the indirect sense-appeal of a description, for smell is perhaps more intimately related to memory than is any other sense. Feeling has its vital place in the one important art that consciously and deliberately appeals to the sense of feeling. And if anyone doubts the value of the gustatory appeal, he should reread a score of passages

in which Dickens invites him to sit down at an old-fashioned English dinner

It is, of course, not always practicable nor desirable to appeal to all of the senses in a single description. In fact, the description that does appeal to every one of the five senses is the exception rather than the rule. No scene, however, could be so utterly lacking in sensory variety as the student's description of Main Street would imply. By way of contrast to the flabby work of the novice let us examine a skilled artist's description of an admittedly unanimated scene

It was afternoon, and Kingsborough was asleep

Along the verdurous gray lanes the houses seemed abandoned, shuttered, filled with shade. From the courthouse green came the chime of cow bells rising and falling in slow waves of sound. A spotted calf stood bleating in the crooked footpath, which traversed diagonally the waste of buttercups like a white seam in a cloth of gold. Against the arching sky rose the bell tower of the grim old church, where the sparrows twittered in the melancholy gables and the startled face of the stationary clock stared blankly above the ivied walls. Farther away, at the end of a wavering lane, slanted the shadow of the insane asylum

Across the green the houses were set in surrounding gardens like cards in bouquets of mixed blossoms. They were of frame for the most part, with shingled roofs and small, square windows hidden beneath climbing roses. On one of the long verandas a sleeping girl lay in a hammock, a gray cat at her feet. No sound came from the house behind her, but a breeze blew through the dim hall, fluttering the folds of her dress. Beyond the adjoining garden a lady in mourning entered a gate where honeysuckle grew, and above, on the low dormered roof, a white pigeon sat preening its feathers. Up the main street, where a few sunken bricks of a vanished pavement were still visible, an old negro woman, sitting on the stone before

her cabin, lighted her replenished pipe with a taper, and leaned back, smoking, in the doorway, her scarlet handkerchief making a spot of colour on the dull background³

—Ellen Glasgow *The Voice of the People* Book I,
Chap II

Obviously, the gray lanes of Kingsborough are as quiet and as humdrum as our student's Main Street could possibly be, but Kingsborough, as Miss Glasgow presents it, is only sleeping—not dead. In Kingsborough we find not merely outline and color, we find motion and sound as well. We find, too, hints of feeling, odor, and taste—hints which, although not entirely satisfying, help to make Miss Glasgow's description something more than just a lifeless word-painting. The shuttered houses suggest a pervading summer warmth which is relieved, a little later, by the fluttering breeze. There is a genuine, if faint, breath of rose and honeysuckle. And in connection with the picture of the old negro woman there is—for every pipe-smoker at least—an appeal to the palate as well as to the nose.

3 DESCRIPTION DISTINGUISHED FROM EXPOSITION

Since pure description is always a record of sensations, it is obvious that it differs markedly from exposition, for whereas description necessarily depicts or reproduces, exposition is altogether a matter of explaining or informing. Description is, in other words, essentially and inevitably concrete and pictorial, exposition, largely abstract and wholly ideational. If I identify my motor car by saying that it is a small sedan with navy-blue body and chocolate-brown wheels, I am, of course, describing it. If, on the other hand, I identify it by saying that it is an exception-

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ally economical car to operate, I am not describing at all, I am expounding

A college girl, who was asked to write a short description of a person, submitted the following paragraph on the Dean of Women

Miss Pearson is firm, but kind and reasonable. She assumes that every girl in the dormitory is a self-respecting, rule-abiding young lady, until a girl proves herself to be otherwise. By loyally attending all football games and "pep" meetings, and by being 'one of the girls' at the college dances, Miss Pearson shows how human she is. She is a splendid combination of warm heartedness and good judgment. I would almost as soon confide in her as in my own mother.

This is appreciative—but it isn't description! In fact, there is not a word of genuine description in the entire paragraph. Is Miss Pearson large or small? Is she a blonde or a brunette? What can be said of her voice, her gait, her gestures, or her apparel? Had the student written a descriptive paragraph, she would have answered at least a portion of these questions. If we expect to acquire skill in the art of description, we must keep clearly in mind the distinction between description and exposition.

This distinction will be sufficiently apparent to us if we will contrast the student's characterization of Miss Pearson with Dickens's portrait of Dick Swiveller.

It was perhaps not very unreasonable to suspect from what had already passed that Mr Swiveller was not quite recovered from the effects of the powerful sunlight to which he had made allusion, but if no such suspicion had been awakened by his speech, his wiry hair, dull eyes, and sallow face, would still have been strong witnesses against him. His attire was not, as he had himself hinted, remarkable for the nicest arrangement, but was in a state of disorder which strongly induced the idea that he had gone to bed in

it It consisted of a brown body coat with a great many brass buttons up the front and only one behind, a bright check neckerchief, a plaid waistcoat, soiled white trousers, and a very limp hat, worn with the wrong side foremost, to hide a hole in the brim The breast of his coat was ornamented with an outside pocket from which there peeped forth the cleanest end of a very large and very ill favored handkerchief his dirty wristbands were pulled down as far as possible and ostentatiously folded back over his cuffs, he displayed no gloves, and carried a yellow cane having at the top a bone hand with the semblance of a ring on its little finger and a black ball in its grasp With all these personal advantages (to which may be added a strong savor of tobacco smoke, and a prevailing greasiness of appearance) Mr Swiveller leant back in his chair with eyes fixed on the ceiling, and occasionally pitching his voice to the needful key, obliged the company with a few bars of an intensely dismal air, and then, in the middle of a note, relapsed into his former silence

—*The Old Curiosity Shop*, Chap II

Dickens really gives us as adequate an idea of the personality of Dick Swiveller as the enthusiastic young lady has given us of the personality of her dean But he gives us much more, he gives us a living, glowing image of Mr Swiveller—an image so vivid and colorful that we could hardly fail to recognize the shabby-smart young Londoner if we were to meet him In other words, Dickens is not content with giving us mere information about Dick Swiveller, he makes us see and hear and smell the genial, sallow, slovenly, bombastic, tobacco-reeking young cockney

EXERCISES

1 Of the passages appended to this chapter, which one is obviously included to illustrate variety of sensations? In the passage selected do you consider variety of sensations indispen-

sable or merely desirable? Why? Could a painter have handled this scene as effectively as the writer has done?

2 Point out the exposition in the appended passages. Does the exposition strengthen or weaken the description which it accompanies?

3 Do you find among the appended passages one which is purely expository?

4 Apply the above tests to passages appended to other chapters of this book.

5 Write a brief description of the main street of your home town or of some other street with which you are familiar. Do not be deterred by the fact that you have as yet had little training in the technique of description.

6 Describe the sights, sounds, and odors of a crowded concert hall just before the beginning of the program. Make your composition a coherent, animated, entertaining description—not a prosy catalogue.

7 Describe an autumnal picnic supper in the woods.

8 Describe the interior of a village railroad station or bus station.

9 Write a purely expository character sketch of one of your professors or of some interesting person in your home community.

10 Write a description of the same person, endeavoring to make your description reveal character as well as portray the person's external appearance. The revelation of character will, of course, be indirect, but if it is artistically done, its very indirectness will enhance its effectiveness. Before attempting to handle this assignment, turn back to page 236 and re-examine the paragraphs on Miss Pearson and Dick Swiveller, respectively.

ILLUSTRATIVE SELECTIONS

COKETOWN

The streets were hot and dusty on the summer day, and the sun was so bright that it even shone through the heavy vapor

drooping over Coketown, and could not be looked at steadily. Stokers emerged from low, underground doorways into factory yards, and sat on steps, and posts, and palings, wiping their swarthy visages, and contemplating coals. The whole town seemed to be frying in oil. There was a stifling smell of hot oil everywhere. The steam engines shone with it, the dresses of the hands were soiled with it, the mills throughout their many stories oozed and trickled it. The atmosphere of those fairy palaces was like the breath of the simoon, and their inhabitants, wasting with heat, toiled languidly in the desert. But no temperature made the melancholy mad elephants more mad or more sane. Their wearisome heads went up and down at the same rate, in hot weather and cold, wet weather and dry, fair weather and foul. The measured motion of their shadows on the walls was the substitute Coketown had to show for the shadows of rustling woods, while for the summer hum of insects, it could offer, all the year round, from the dawn of Monday to the night of Saturday, the whirl of shafts and wheels. Drowsily they whirled all through the summer day, making the passenger more sleepy and more hot as he passed the humming walls of the mills. Sun-blinds and sprinklings of water a little cooled the main streets and the shop, but the mills, and the courts, and alleys, baked at a fierce heat. Down upon the river that was black and thick with dye, some Coketown boys who were at large—a rare sight there—rowed a crazy boat which made a spumous track upon the water as it jogged along, while every dip of an oar stirred up vile smells.

—Dickens *Hard Times*, Book II, Chap. I

MAUPASSANT'S IMPRESSION OF SWINBURNE

M. Swinburne was small and thin, amazingly thin at first sight, a sort of fantastic apparition. When I looked at him for the first time, I thought of Edgar Poe. The forehead was very large under long hair, and the face went narrowing down to a tiny chin, shaded by a thin tuft of beard. A very slight moustache slipped over lips which were extraordinarily delicate and were pressed together, while what seemed an endless neck

joined this head, which was alive only in its bright, penetrating, and fixed eyes, to a body without shoulders, since the upper part of Swinburne's chest seemed scarcely broader than his forehead. The whole of this almost supernatural personage was stirred by nervous shudders.⁴

—Edmund Gosse *Portraits and Sketches*, p. 29

MRS BRIGSTOCK

Mrs Brigstock, sitting stiffly on the plush bench, in brown quilled hat and coat and skirt, is, one would guess, a clerk of some sort. She lacks color, she lacks repose, she lacks—one stops to consider that she might possibly be a beautiful woman were it not for the things she lacks. But she is the product of fifteen years or so of long hours and little lunch. Certainly at this moment she is not seen at her best. She sits twisting her gloved hands, pulling at a loose thread, now and then biting it. Otherwise she bites her lips, her face is drawn, and she stares in front of her with only a twist of the eye now and then towards her husband, who is uncomfortable upon a chair a few feet away.⁵

—Granville Barker *The Madras House* (Introductory stage directions for Act II)

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

Theodore Roosevelt always believed that character was of greater worth and moment than anything else. He possessed abilities of the first order, which he was disposed to underrate, because he set so much greater store upon the moral qualities which we bring together under the single word "character."

Let me speak first of his abilities. He had a powerful, well-trained, ever-active mind. He thought clearly, independently, and with originality and imagination. These priceless gifts were sustained by an extraordinary power of acquisition, joined to a greater quickness of apprehension, a greater swiftness in seizing upon the essence of a question, than I have ever hap-

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⁵ Copyright Little, Brown & Company. Reprinted by permission.

pened to see in any other man His reading began with natural history, then went to general history, and thence to the whole field of literature He had a capacity for concentration which enabled him to read with remarkable rapidity anything which he took up, if only for a moment, and which separated him for the time being from everything going on about him The subjects upon which he was well and widely informed would, if enumerated, fill a large space, and to this power of acquisition was united not only a tenacious but an extraordinary [*sic*] accurate memory It was never safe to contest with him on any question of fact or figures, whether they related to the ancient Assyrians or to the present day conditions of the tribes of central Africa, to the Syracusan Expedition, as told by Thucydides, or to protective coloring in birds and animals He knew and held details always at command, but he was not mastered by them He never failed to see the forest on account of the trees or the city on account of the houses

—Henry Cabot Lodge Congressional Memorial Address,
Feb 9, 1919

The Sources of Description

☞ A YOUNG STUDENT WITH literary aspirations was once asked to describe from memory a certain square in his home town. To his great chagrin he discovered that although he had passed that square almost every day for fifteen years, he could describe it but vaguely. In other words, he was in the predicament of Edwin Clayhanger, of whom Arnold Bennett says "The fact was he had never opened his eyes in Bursley. Dozens of times he must have passed the Sytch Pottery, and yet not noticed, not suspected, that it differed from any other pot-works"¹

1 READING

Perhaps this student had had an almost subconscious feeling that the best material for literature is to be found in literature itself. Many writers, it must be admitted, owe their descriptive ability to wide reading. This applies especially to authors who have written of remote historical times. Sir Walter Scott perused many an old book to build up the settings for the brilliant medieval

¹ Arnold Bennett *Clayhanger*

pageants depicted in his novels Charles Reade prepared himself for writing *The Cloister and the Hearth* by reading hundreds of books and manuscripts pertaining to the European Renaissance And early in the present century Bertha Runkle, a nineteen-year-old American girl who had never set foot on foreign soil, succeeded in writing a best-seller—*The Helmet of Navarre*—with a French setting Unquestionably, reading has an important influence upon the describer If it is not the source of his facts, it may become the source of his inspiration It is rare that an author achieves success without the guidance he finds in the work of other writers The whole history of the world's literature shows that writers have been intelligent and admiring readers The amateur writer must find in his favorite authors both inspiration and suggestion of methods This applies as truly to description as to any other phase of literary technique

2 FANTASY

Some of the most brilliant descriptions in literature are based upon sheer fantasy The works of Coleridge, Poe, and William Blake bear eloquent witness to this fact The scenes and characters depicted in such works as *The Ancient Mariner*, *Christabel*, *Ulalume*, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, and *The Book of Thel* owe comparatively little to reading and still less to firsthand observation

3 FIRST-HAND OBSERVATION

Literature, however, boasts of very few Coleridges or Poes or Blakes It boasts of even fewer nineteen-year old girls who write best-sellers laid in scenes they have never visited If the aspiring young author would write of places either near or remote, he will do well to visit those places and record his impressions as an eyewitness It

would be extremely difficult for one who has never been in South America to match W H Hudson's rich and accurate descriptions of that continent, because Hudson was born and reared there, and had been an accurate observer of all he saw. It is said that Joseph Conrad based *Nostromo*, a novel dealing with South America, on a book with which he was familiar in his childhood, but, even so, he made two fleeting visits to South American ports. In short, the describer should write with his eye upon the object. Certainly very little great realistic description was ever written in any other way.

4 INSPIRATION AFFORDED BY TRAVEL

The power of keen observation is often best acquired by travel. One's attention is bound to be arrested and held by persons, objects, and scenes that differ markedly from those at home. The Iowa farmer's senses are quickened by a visit to Chicago with its scurrying crowds, its looming office buildings, and its roaring elevated trains. The prairie dweller's eyes grow big at first sight of the Appalachians or the Rockies. The Minneapolis grocer finds in semitropical Pasadena a fairyland. The schoolmistress from Omaha probably gets a greater thrill from the walls and the cathedral of old Chester than any Englishman can ever get.

5 ONE'S HOME SURROUNDINGS

Even so, the young writer will do especially well to note that some of the most successful descriptive artists, perhaps the majority, have found their main inspiration in their home communities—frequently small and prosaic communities. Every student of description may at least make a thorough canvass of the local-color possibilities of the environment in which his lot happens to be cast. If he

will do this, he is bound to discover that his home town, be it large or small, is a much more fascinating place than he had ever suspected. And if he will stop to consider the matter, he will realize that the stay-at-home has one notable advantage over the globe-trotter: the stay-at-home may return again and again to the scene that he has chosen to describe, he may ponder over it until its every detail is engraved in his imagination.

6 DESCRIBING WITH THE EYE UPON THE OBJECT

The main fact to be noted, however, is that great descriptive writers of widely varying temperaments and environments have written with their eyes upon the objects described. All have learned to observe the world before attempting to describe it. In that connection, let us consider the advice once given by Gustave Flaubert, one of the most superb technicians who ever wielded a pen. "Look," said Flaubert, "at any one thing you intend to depict, long and attentively enough to discover some aspect which has been seen and expressed by no one else. In everything there lurks an unexplored corner, for we have contracted the habit of using our eyes with the remembrance of what others have thought about what we see. The merest trifle contains the unknown. If you wish to describe a fire burning, or a tree on a plain, stand in front of that fire or that tree till they cease to resemble in your eyes any other fire or tree."²

Perhaps few of even the greatest writers have taken Flaubert's advice quite literally. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note how many have followed the spirit of that advice. George Eliot, as a child, is said to have noticed farmyards and gardens and rural folk with far

² Van de Velde *French Fiction of To day*, Vol I, p 77. Published by Trischler & Co., London, 1891.

more curiosity and penetration than that shown by even the normally alert child. Dickens, we are told, found childhood scenes in Marshalsea prison more fascinating than the best of stage plays. Tennyson, who is perhaps the most accurately vivid of all English descriptive poets, had the habit of observing unfamiliar birds and flowers so closely that when he returned to his study he could readily identify them in books on ornithology and on botany. He also discovered unusual things about the more familiar birds and flowers—for instance, that the underpetals of the English daisy are of pinkish hue. And Arnold Bennett, although his works show little landscape appreciation, must have begun very early to fix sharp eyes upon men and women and children, upon houses and shops and streets. In a sense, these examples may prove discouraging to the young author who aspires to great descriptive power. He may feel that great geniuses have been gifted by the gods with an almost supernatural propensity for observing, and that he is not one of the elect. He should remember, however, that observation is largely a matter of self-training, and that failure to observe may generally be ascribed to mental laziness or to failure to appreciate one's surroundings.

7 KEEPING A NOTEBOOK

Every writer may safely and profitably keep a notebook and write copiously therein. True, some of the foremost descriptive artists—notably Balzac—scorned the taking of written notes. But, on the other hand, Dickens and other great authors who began their literary careers as reporters must have benefited tremendously by the fact that their occupation compelled them to take notes constantly. No ambitious young writer who would depict nature or humanity vividly and unforgettably can do

better than to follow the plan once followed by Arnold Bennett. Bennett tells us that he once made it a pastime to get up before dawn on summer mornings and wander about the thoroughfares of London in deliberate quest of striking material. The first "note" he ever gathered was "that the ground in front of the all night coffee stalls was white with eggshells!" This note proved extremely discouraging to him—so discouraging, indeed, that immediately after telling about it he exclaims "What I needed then was an operation for cataract!"³ But the eggshells were an excellent beginning. Right then and there Arnold Bennett was learning to paint his remarkable portraits of Darius Clayhanger and Mr Shushions and Auntie Hamps.

This brings us back to the original thesis of this chapter, namely, that the material for description may be derived from one or more of three possible sources: reading, sheer fantasy, and first-hand observation, and that by far the greatest of these is first-hand observation.

EXERCISES

1 Observe closely the street on which you live, especially your immediate neighborhood. Are the sidewalks uniform or varied? Do the houses stand close to the street or well back? What do the houses show as regards architecture, probable age, and state of repair? What peculiarities do you notice about the grounds? What varieties of shade trees line the street? Notice, if possible, two adjacent houses of the same general type of architecture. By what peculiarities of windows, doors, chimneys, etc., can you differentiate these houses? Be sure to take copious written notes for future reference.

2 Observe the main street of your home town. Which buildings are of brick? which, of stone? which, of concrete?

³ Arnold Bennett *The Author's Craft*, p. 18

which, of wood? How do the buildings compare as to height? breadth? What do you observe regarding window displays? How many different varieties of sensations do you get as you pass along the street or stand at a given point on the street? Take written notes for future reference

3 Observe some interior, for instance, a student's room. What does the room reveal as regards the tastes, interests, and orderliness of the occupant?

4 To study a landscape intelligently, you must learn some thing about botany and ornithology. Get a good book on each of these two subjects. You will also find a field glass useful. What do you observe about the larger aspects of the landscape? How do the fields differ as to vegetation or lack of vegetation? What varieties of trees do you notice? of flowers? of birds? How many flowers can you identify, either with or without the aid of your book on botany? How many birds, either with or without your book on ornithology?

5 Observe the persons in a small group. How would you differentiate them as to size, age, clothing, speech, gait, gestures, or general manner? Observe closely some obviously peculiar person. Just what are his peculiarities? Observe, in the same way, some more conventional person.

6 Describe the view from your window.

7 Describe from memory some scene that interested you on your summer vacation trip or on some other recent trip.

8 Describe from memory a place that you have not visited since your childhood days.

9 Describe from memory a scene in or near your home town.

10 When next you visit your home town, describe the same scene from direct observation. Do you not find that in doing Exercise 9 you missed some extremely interesting and important details?

11 Write a purely imaginary description of a scene in ancient Greece, a scene in mediaeval Italy or France, a scene in Elizabethan England, or a scene in pre-Revolutionary America. After you have completed your description, com-

pare it with a corresponding description written by some eminent historian or historical novelist

12 Write a description based upon sheer fantasy (See page 248)

The Technique of Description

1 INDIVIDUALIZATION, THE ESSENCE OF GOOD DESCRIPTION

☞§ A CERTAIN COLLEGE freshman, asked by his English instructor to write a two-page descriptive theme on the main street of his home town, described the downtown section of Euclid Avenue, Cleveland. Here is the theme

As I stood on the corner of East Ninth Street, looking down Euclid Avenue one afternoon in July, I realized that I was on one of the busiest thoroughfares in America. I had a general sense of looming buildings, brilliant shop-windows, dense traffic, and scurrying, jostling multitudes.

Most of the crowd were well dressed, smart young drug-clerks and *chic* flapper salesladies vying sartorially with the sleek bankers and elegant society dames with whom they rubbed elbows. Here and there, however, a ragged news-boy darted in and out of the throng, shouting his wares. Now and then a dingy laborer, dinner-bucket in hand, pushed and shuffled stolidly along. And on the fringe of the crowd,

loitering at the window of a one-price shoe store or a red-front Woolworth, stood some bewildered but fascinated down stater, noticeably uncomfortable in his ill fitting Sunday clothes

There was a constant hubbub, an interminable din Traffic cops whistles shrieked, car gongs jangled yellow taxis honked and hooted at leisurely sedans and limousines, rusty Fords wheezed and rattled beside gleaming, purring Cadillacs, shabby urchins and shabbier old women yelled, 'Extry! extry! Nooz or Press! Extry e *dish* ing! All 'bout big West Side pay roll robb'ry!'

The languid summer breeze wafted to my nostrils the scent of gasoline, coal smoke, and hot tar, which blended with the smell of drug store and restaurant and the half pleasant, half sickening odor of tobacco, perfume, talcum powder, and perspiration

According to nearly all the canons of description, this theme is excellent The general arrangement may be somewhat mechanical, the language not consistently distinguished, and the metaphorical element disappointingly meager, but, for all that, the description is a highly meritorious performance for a college freshman Thanks to a swiftness of movement, an adequate variety of sensations, and a number of remarkably well-chosen concrete words, the theme portrays graphically the buildings, the crowds, the rush, and the din of a typical large American city The one glaring weakness of the theme is that it is too typical It does not say a word that might not be said with equal truth of State Street, Chicago, Woodward Avenue, Detroit, Washington Street, Indianapolis, or almost any other of the fifteen or twenty most important business thoroughfares in America True, the freshman might quote in his defense the declaration of a present-day English novelist that all American cities—at any rate, all Middle Western cities—are just alike But from our point of view the Englishman is wrong To an observing

American, our cities look no more alike than Cantonese laundrymen look to an observing Chinese. Euclid Avenue, because of its relative newness and lack of historic interest, undoubtedly has less individuality than lower Broadway, New York, Market Street, Philadelphia, or Washington Street, Boston, but it has a marked individuality none the less. Its peculiar bend rightward, just as it leaves the Public Square, its intersection of astonishingly narrow cross streets, its slightly oblique crossing of East Ninth Street, its numerous arcades, and its relatively low skyline, attributable to a conservative building code—all these features combined would serve admirably to distinguish Euclid Avenue from State Street, Woodward Avenue, or any other thoroughfare.

Individualizing the conventional—

In describing either a landscape or a person, the writer should single out the particular features which distinguish that landscape or that person from landscapes and persons in general. We remember Rostand's Cyrano de Bergerac, for example, because of his prodigious nose, Dickens's Captain Cuttle, because of the hook which replaces his lost arm. We think of Pisa as the city with the leaning tower, Paris, as the city with boulevard cafes, and Venice, as the city with canals for streets.

"But these persons and places," the student may argue, "are all of them notably unconventional." Perhaps so. Observe, however, Theophile Gautier's description of the heart of Berlin, one of the newest, least quaint, least picturesque of the great European capitals.

There before me was a city regularly built, stately, with wide streets, extensive public grounds, and imposing edifices of a style half English, half German, and modern to the last degree.

As we drove along I glanced down into those cellars, with steps so polished, so slippery, so well-soaped, that one might slide in as into the den of an ant lion

These handsome stately houses, which are like palaces, with their columns and pediments and architraves, are built of brick for the most part, for stone seems rare in Berlin, but the brick is covered with cement or tinted stucco, to simulate hewn stone, deceitful seams indicate imaginary layers, and the illusion would be complete, were it not that in spots the winter frosts have detached the cement, revealing the red shades of the baked clay The necessity of painting the whole façade, in order to mask the nature of the material, gives the effect of enormous architectural decorations seen in open air The salient parts, moldings, cornices, entablatures, consoles, are of wood, bronze, or cast iron, to which suitable forms have been given, when you do not look too closely the effect is satisfactory Truth is the only thing lacking in all this splendor

The hotel is very well located, and I propose to sketch the view seen from its steps It will give a fair idea of the general character of the city The foreground is a quay bordering the Spree A few boats with slender masts are sleeping on the brown water Vessels upon a canal or a river, in the heart of a city, have always a charming effect Along the opposite quay stretches a line of houses, a few of them are ancient, and bear the stamp thereof, the king's palace makes the corner A cupola upon an octagonal tower rises proudly above the other roofs, the square sides of the tower adding grace to the curve of the dome¹

—"A Look at the German Capital," from *A Winter in Russia*

After a careful reading of this description, can you forget the general spaciousness and the un-European regularity and modernness of Berlin, the half-English, half-German

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architecture, the cellars with their immaculate and slippery steps, the brick houses with their veneer of stucco, the thin masted boats sleeping on the brown water of the turbid Spree River, in the heart of the great metropolis, the cupola-crowned octagonal tower which rises proudly above the other roofs? Most assuredly you cannot forget any of these features. And if it is possible to individualize Berlin, then it is equally possible to individualize any big American town.

Comparison and contrast—

Inseparably linked with the art of individualization is the use of comparison. This device may be employed either positively or negatively, that is, things may be compared either by similarity or by contrast. Two contiguous objects may be the more striking either because of their likeness or because of their unlikeness. The psychological significance of a large object beside a small object, of a black object against a white background, is so obvious that we need but mention it here. The psychological significance of two contiguous objects which are similar or dissimilar in only one striking detail is scarcely less obvious. In this connection, the student should turn to page 268 below, to the paragraph in which George Eliot describes Broxton Parsonage, and note her method of imaging the decanters. He should also turn to Chapter XI of *David Copperfield* and note how the thin and faded Mrs. Micawber serves as a foil for the stoutish Micawber with his grand manner, imposing shirt collar, and jaunty walking-stick.

EXERCISES

- 1 Write a description of some queer character in your home town.

2 Write a description of some unusual place with which you are familiar

3 Make a studied effort to individualize a manifestly typical American street which you have chosen to describe

4 Make a studied effort to individualize some manifestly conventional person whom you have chosen to describe

5 Write a description involving comparison and contrast of details

6 Study the selections on pages 284, 287, 292, 293, 294, 295, 296, and 298, with special reference to individualization. Indicate specific details and devices which serve to individualize the persons and the objects described in these paragraphs

7 Study the selections on pages 289, 290, 291, 293, 294, 295, 297, and 300, with special reference to the use which each author has made of comparison, or contrast, or both comparison and contrast

8 After you have studied the passages involved in Exercises 6 and 7, reread what you have written in connection with the preceding exercises. Revise at least two or three of your descriptions

2 SCIENTIFIC VERSUS ESTHETIC DESCRIPTION

So far, we have been treating description as a homogeneous entity. As a matter of fact, however, there are two separate and distinct kinds of description: first, scientific or expository description, and secondly, esthetic or literary description. It is, of course, with the second variety that we are mainly concerned, but description, even as an art, cannot be fully understood by anyone who has not learned the fundamental principles of scientific description.

Concreteness of pure description—

The student will bear in mind that pure description is entirely concrete, that it always appeals to one or more of

the five physical senses through the medium of the imagination, that it is, in short, the spoken or written record of a sensation or a group of sensations. This is true of all unadulterated description, of whatever variety. The difference, therefore, between scientific and esthetic description is a difference of purpose and method rather than of material. In a *Baedeker* one can find an elaborate description of Westminster Abbey. In Washington Irving's *Sketch Book* he can find an equally elaborate description. And yet a brief comparison of the two will show that they are as thoroughly different as two descriptions with the same setting could well be. The *Baedeker* stresses dimensions with mathematical exactness, it gives, with scientific accuracy, the locations of particular tombs, statues, busts, naves, transepts, choirs, and chapels. The Irving description, while making no attempt to give exact dimensions or locations, lays emphasis upon the beauty, grandeur, age, gloom, and romantic associations of the Abbey. The distinction is, obviously, that whereas Baedeker is attempting to give the tourist specific information of practical value, Irving endeavors to kindle the imagination of an appreciative reader.

Let us take two or three other illustrations. Some day in the post-office or some other public building you chance to observe a placard offering a large reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of an escaped criminal, a detailed description of whom appears upon the placard. Now if you will go home and read Dickens's descriptions of Orlick, in *Great Expectations*, and of Bill Sikes, in *Oliver Twist*, you will readily note that both in purpose and in method Dickens differs markedly from the writer of the description on the placard. Again, compare and contrast some ornithologist's description of the European skylark with Shelley's description. Compare

and contrast the botanist's account of the small celandine with Wordsworth's account of the same flower

EXERCISES

1 Write two descriptions of a street with which you are familiar one, a description which would be suitable for a guidebook, the other, a description calculated to kindle the reader's imagination

2 Write two descriptions of a person of your acquaintance one, a description which would be useful to detectives in apprehending that person, the other, a description suitable for inclusion in a short story or a novel

3 POINT OF VIEW

The student will not advance far in the art of description until he has learned something about point of view, for point of view is one of the great unifying elements in esthetic description There are two main points of view the physical and the psychological

Physical point of view—

Physical point of view has to do with time, place, and other external physical conditions The appearance of—let us say—State Street in Chicago depends a great deal upon whether it is viewed from the Van Buren Street elevated station, from a given point on the sidewalk, or from a moving vehicle Similarly, it depends upon whether the street is viewed on a bargain-day afternoon, on a Saturday night, or on a Sunday morning Finally, State Street in the grip of a February blizzard is not at all the same thoroughfare as State Street in the glare of a breathless July noon

The important fact for the writer to keep in mind is that physical point of view must be clear-cut and con-

sistent Stevenson has depicted Edinburgh, not as seen from nowhere in particular or from everywhere, but clearly and consistently as observed from Calton Hill, and although he takes the liberty of shifting his viewpoint as regards time, light, and weather, he is scrupulously careful to give his reader warning of each change. Unfortunately some writers—even writers as eminent as Stevenson—have not always been so careful. Indeed, the cynic in quest of flaws could find many instances of experienced writers' inadvertently making ludicrous changes of viewpoint. Dickens, in a well known scene at Dotheboys' Hall in *Nicholas Nickleby*, depicts a morning so cold that the pump is frozen, on the same morning he has one of the boys hoeing turnips in the garden. A more recent English novelist, in a vivid description of a pitch-black night on the deck of a ship, amazes and disconcerts his reader by setting forth the brilliant coloring of the breeches of a certain sailor. The young writer must realize, by all means, that he cannot be too assiduous in his efforts to avoid such lapses from consistency of viewpoint.

This, of course, does not mean that it is impossible for a well unified description to contain more than one physical point of view. Browning, in *De Gustibus*, quickly transports his reader from an English lane to a castle in the Apennines, and thence to a seaside house in southern Italy, the unifying element in this description being the general principle that tastes differ. Hamlin Garland, in the passage which we quote on pages 285-287, gives the reader what may be termed a description within a description. Here the main setting is an Illinois landscape as viewed from a car window, but through the heroine's imagination the reader reverts momentarily to a Wisconsin farm.

Psychological point of view—

The psychological point of view is concerned with the individual bias, the mental attitude, of the observer. If an interior is described, is it described from the objective standpoint of a connoisseur on household furnishings, or from the subjective standpoint of a sneak thief who is estimating the possibilities for booty? A dwelling house does not appear quite the same to an enthusiastic real estate agent as it appears to a discontented tenant. The chief hotel of Piqua, Ohio, is one place when viewed by a commercial traveler from Detroit or Cleveland, it is quite another place when viewed, even under exactly the same physical conditions, by the proud Piquan or by the untraveled farmer's lad. In this connection, let us note Main Street, Gopher Prairie, as it appeared to Carol Kennicott, who had newly arrived from St. Paul and Minneapolis.

It was not only the unsparing unapologetic ugliness and the rigid straightness which overwhelmed her. It was the planlessness, the flimsy temporariness of the buildings, their faded unpleasant colors. The street was cluttered with electric light poles, telephone poles, gasoline pumps for motor cars, boxes of goods. Each man had built with the most valiant disregard of all the others. Between a new "block" of two story brick shops on one side, and the firebrick Overland garage on the other side, was a one story cottage turned into a millinery shop. The white temple of the Farmers' Bank was elbowed back by a grocery of glaring yellow brick. One store-building had a patchy galvanized iron cornice, the building beside it was crowned with battlements and pyramids of brick capped with blocks of red sandstone.

She escaped from Main Street, fled home.²

—Sinclair Lewis *Main Street*, Chap. IV

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And now let us note Main Street, Gopher Prairie, as it appeared to Bea Sorenson, who had newly arrived from the farm

As she marched up the street she was meditating that it didn't hardly seem like it was possible there could be so many folks all in one place at the same time My! It would take years to get acquainted with them all And swell people, too! A big fine gentleman in a new pink shirt with a diamond, and not no washed out blue denim working shirt A lovely lady in a longery dress (but it must be an awful hard dress to wash) And the stores!

Not just three of them, like there were at Scandia Crossing, but more than four whole blocks!

The Bon Ton Store—big as four barns—my! it would simply scare a person to go in there, with seven or eight clerks all looking at you

A drug store with a soda fountain that was just huge, awful long, and all lovely marble, and on it there was a great big lamp with the biggest shade you ever saw .

A hotel, awful high three stories, one right on top of another, you had to stick your head back to look clear up to the top

A Lutheran Church Here in the city there'd be lovely sermons, and church twice on Sunday, *every* Sunday!

And a movie show!

—Sinclair Lewis *Main Street*, Chap IV

The psychological point of view depends not only upon the individual person, but also upon his particular mood or mental attitude at the time when his impressions are recorded Apropos of this point, let us examine Poem VII of *In Memoriam*, in which Tennyson describes Wimpole Street, London, as it appeared to him a short time after the death of his friend Hallam

Dark house, by which once more I stand
Here in the long unlovely street,

Doors, where my heart was used to beat
So quickly, waiting for a hand,

A hand that can be clasped no more—
Behold me, for I cannot sleep,
And like a guilty thing I creep
At earliest morning to the door

He is not here but far away
The noise of life begins again,
And ghastly thro' the drizzling rain
On the bald street breaks the blank day

Now as a matter of objective fact, Wimpole Street is neither "unlovely" nor "bald," even under unfavorable weather conditions. On the contrary, it is a representative residential thoroughfare of the fashionable West End—a more than ordinarily prepossessing street, as London streets go. Under agreeable circumstances, Tennyson himself would have been among the first to admit this.

Dominant tone—

Closely interlinked with point of view is dominant tone. By dominant tone we mean the most outstanding impression produced by any setting described. To state the matter more specifically, almost any object or group of objects worth describing will be found, under close scrutiny, to convey to the observer some one impression which predominates over all other impressions. The fact that the object or group of objects may convey one impression to you, and a quite different impression to your neighbor, does not make a particle of difference. In the passages which we have just examined from Mr. Lewis's *Main Street*, the dominant tone to Carol Kennicott is ugly planlessness, to Bea Sorenson, it is grandeur.

One physical condition which often affords a striking dominant tone is weather. Dickens is a writer who is conspicuously sensitive to weather conditions. In this connection, note the following passage from the first chapter of *Bleak House*:

Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows, fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping, and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex marshes, fog on the Kentish heights. Fog creeping into the cabooses of collier brigs, fog lying out on the yards and hovering in the rigging of great ships, fog drooping on the gunwales of barges and small boats. Fog in the eyes and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners, wheezing by the firesides of their wards, fog in the stem and bowl of the afternoon pipe of the wrathful skipper, down in his close cabin, fog cruelly pinching the toes and fingers of his shivering little 'prentice boy on deck. Chance people on the bridges peeping over the parapets into a nether sky of fog, with fog all round them, as if they were up in a balloon, and hanging in the misty clouds.

Gas looming through the fog in divers places in the streets, much as the sun may, from the spongy fields, be seen to loom by husbandman and ploughboy. Most of the shops lighted two hours before their time—as the gas seems to know, for it has a haggard and unwilling look.

This passage is an excellent example of dominant tone, and in many respects it is a worthy model for the amateur to follow. In general, however, the young writer will do well to avoid depending upon a single word for his effect, as Dickens depends upon the word *fog* here. A somewhat more subtle treatment of weather will be found in Madison Cawein's sonnet *Zero*:

The gate, on ice-hoarse hinges, stiff with frost,
Croaks open, and harsh wagon wheels are heard

Creaking through cold, the horses' breath is furred
Around their nostrils, and with snow deep mossed
The hut is barely seen, from which, uptossed,
The wood-smoke pillars the icy air unstirred,
And every sound, each axe stroke and each word,
Comes as through crystal, then again is lost
The sun strikes bitter on the frozen pane
And all around there is a tingling,—tense
As is the wire stretched upon a disc
Vibrating without sound —It is the strain
That Winter plays, to which each tree and fence,
It seems, is strung, as 'twere of ringing bisque³
—*Vale of Tempe*, p 261

The art of describing a person with particular attention to dominant tone may be studied in the following passage from Chapter XXVIII of Hardy's *The Woodlanders*

He looked and smelt like Autumn's very brother, his face being sunburnt to wheat color, his eyes blue as corn flowers, his boots and leggings dyed with fruit stains, his hands clammy with the sweet juice of apples, his hat sprinkled with pips, and everywhere about him that atmosphere of cider which at its first return each season has such an indescribable fascination for those who have been born and bred among the orchards⁴

In the foregoing passages we have been considering dominant tones which are almost purely physical That a dominant tone may be psychological, we have already hinted in our consideration of the ways in which Main Street, Gopher Prairie, affects Carol Kennicott and Bea Sorenson, respectively We shall further observe this fact by examining a paragraph from Chapter II of Mrs De-land's *The Iron Woman*

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⁴ Copyright 1887, Harper & Brothers Reprinted by permission

Mrs Maitland's parlor was a vast room, rather chilly on this foggy November evening, and smelling of soot. On its remote ceiling was a design in delicate relief of garlands and wreaths, which the dingy years had not been able to rob of its austere beauty. Two veined black marble columns supported an arch that divided the desert of the large room into two smaller rooms, each of which had the center table of the period, its bleak white-marble top covered with elaborately gilded books that no one ever opened. Each room had, too, a great cut glass chandelier, swathed in brown paper muslin and looking like a gigantic withered pear. Each had its fireplace, with a mantelpiece of funereal marble to match the pillars. Mrs Maitland had refurnished this parlor when she came to the old house as a bride, she banished to the lumber room, or even to the auctioneer's stand, the heavy, stately mahogany of the early part of the century, and purchased according to the fashion of the day, glittering rosewood, carved and gilded and as costly as could be found. Between the windows at each end of the long room were mirrors in enormous gilt frames, the windows themselves, topped with cornices and heavy lambrequins, were hung with crimson brocade, a grand piano, very bare and shining, sprawled sidewise between the black columns of the arch, and on the wall opposite the fireplaces were four large landscapes in oil, of exactly the same size. "Herbert likes pictures," the bride said to herself when she purchased them. "That goose Molly Wharton wouldn't have been able to buy 'em for him!" The only pleasant thing in the meaningless room was Nannie's drawing-board, which displayed the little girl's painstaking and surprisingly exact copy in lead-pencil, of some chromo—"Evangeline" perhaps, or some popular sentimentality of the sixties. In the ten years which had elapsed since Mrs Maitland had plunged into her debauch of furnishing the parlor had softened, the enormous roses of the carpets had faded, the glitter of varnish had dimmed, but the change was not sufficient to blur in Mrs Maitland's eyes, all the costly and ugly glory of the room.⁵

⁵ Copyright, 1910, Harper & Brothers. Reprinted by permission.

In the above paragraph, virtually every detail is a more or less time mellowed, but still obtrusive evidence of a well-to-do Philistinism. The author's point of view is, of course, that of a cultivated person of sensitive tastes.

A word of caution is needed at this point. When the young writer first sets out deliberately to invest his description with a dominant tone, he often becomes impatient in his quest of concrete details, and attempts to take an expository short cut. Such a course is palpably bad art. If I say, "The boy seemed to be suffering from the cold," I am really not describing at all, I am merely making a colorless expository statement. Such a statement, unaccompanied by concrete evidence, is vague and unconvincing. Accompanied by concrete evidence, it is as superfluous and as insulting to the reader's intelligence as a trite moral tacked on to a bit of narrative would be. If I say, "The boy shuddered, kicked his heels together, turned up the collar of his coat, and held his red hands to his steaming breath," I am really describing, and describing in a manner calculated to produce an unmistakable dominant tone.

EXERCISES

1 Study the selections on pages 284-300, with special reference to point of view and dominant tone.

2 Read the selections on pages 289-291 as comparative studies in psychological viewpoint. Note, in this connection, that the Coreys are aristocrats of highly cultivated tastes, and that the Laphams are plebeians whose cultural opportunities have been meager. In the selection on page 290, young Corey has just entered the room. (Compare Mrs. Maitland's parlor, page 264.) What can you say of the psychological viewpoint of the selection on page 298?

3 Write a description of a street as you have observed it from some specific vantage ground.

4 Write a description of the same street as you have observed it while passing along that street

5 Write descriptions of the same street, as observed under various conditions of time, season, weather, activity, etc

6 Describe the main business section of a thriving town of ten or fifteen thousand inhabitants (a) as you observe it after spending several weeks in the country, (b) as you observe it after spending several weeks in a large city

7 Describe a junior "prom" (a) from the viewpoint of an unsophisticated young girl who is attending her first formal dance, (b) from the viewpoint of a society belle, (c) from the viewpoint of a disappointed wallflower, (d) from the viewpoint of a disapproving old lady chaperone, (e) from the viewpoint of a good natured old professor In handling this set of assignments, keep clearly in mind the distinction between description and exposition In this connection, review carefully the last three paragraphs in Chapter 9

8 Describe the "rooters'" section at a football game (a) from the viewpoint of one of the "rooters", (b) from the viewpoint of an adherent of the opposing team, (c) from the viewpoint of a staid old professor, (d) from the viewpoint of a disinterested reporter, (e) from the viewpoint of a chance visitor from Europe

9 Reread a number of your descriptions, particularly the ones suggested by Exercise 5 Do you find the dominant tone of every description as clear-cut as it might be? Rewrite at least one of these descriptions

10 As a general review exercise, reread the descriptive selections appended to Chapter 7, with special reference to point of view and dominant tone

4 ARRANGEMENT AND CHOICE OF DETAILS

Coherent arrangement—

Point of view and dominant tone are, of course, largely matters of unity in description A little further study will show that a coherent arrangement of details is quite

as important in a description as is a unifying point of view or dominant tone. If we follow the law of contiguity—that is, if we describe details in the order in which they exist temporally or spatially—we shall at least be coherent. For example, a guidebook, in a scientific description of a museum, will presuppose that the tourist will enter the building by a certain door. It will then describe the several rooms of the museum in such an order that the tourist, by following the guidebook, may visit every nook and corner without retracing his steps. By analogy, an esthetic description of a landscape may proceed with consistent coherence from near to far, from far to near, from left to right, from right to left, from top to bottom, or from bottom to top. Similarly, an esthetic description of a person may proceed from hat to boots, or from boots to hat.

In esthetic description, however, such an order might be artificial and unsatisfying. The psychological reason for this is that we do not always sense objects in a spatial order. For instance, when I look out upon a landscape, the object which first attracts my eye may stand neither in the foreground nor in the background, but at a point somewhere between the two. Hence, the writer of esthetic description finds it most desirable to depict objects in the order in which he senses them.

In this connection, one eminently satisfactory method of procedure is to begin with a fundamental image or comprehensive outline, and then present numerous subordinate details. A stock example of this method, given by Professor Genung and borrowed by numerous later rhetoricians, is Victor Hugo's description of the Battle of Waterloo, in which the author begins by likening the shape of the field and the ensemble of military positions to a capital A. This method, though excellent, is perhaps

not so commonly feasible as the old-fashioned rhetoricians would have us believe. It is, however, employed frequently enough to warrant our careful consideration. Thus, Mr. Eden Phillpotts begins an admirable description of Widecombe Vale by depicting the valley, as a whole, as 'a cradle under a many-colored quilt of little fields' (*Widecombe Fair*, Chap. I). He then proceeds to paint in a number of details which would be utterly confusing if he had not started with a clear-cut fundamental image, a comprehensive outline of the whole scene.

George Eliot employs a similar but much more widely used method in Chapter V of *Adam Bede*, in describing Broxton Parsonage. Unlike Mr. Phillpotts, she does not begin with a vivid simile, but like him, she does present first the general size and shape of the object described. Here is her description:

The room is a large and lofty one, with an ample mulioned oriel window at one end, the walls, you see, are new and not yet painted, but the furniture, though originally of an expensive sort, is old and scanty, and there is no drapery about the window. The crimson cloth over the large dining table is very threadbare, though it contrasts pleasantly enough with the dead hue of the plaster on the walls, but on this cloth there is a massive silver waiter with a decanter of water on it, of the same pattern as two larger ones propped up on the side-board with a coat of arms conspicuous in their center. You suspect at once that the inhabitants of this room have inherited more blood than wealth.

A later novelist, Miss Alice Brown, describes an interior by the same general method, though with greater artistic economy:

The Winterbourne kitchen was large and square and low, with a great blackened beam overhead, heavy doors, and an enormous hearth invaded by a modern range. But beside it

was the door of the brick oven, Lyddy's adjunct to Saturday's baking, and the mantel was high and narrow over it, melting into the wall by a miracle of panelling⁶

—*John Winterbourne's Family*, Chap IV

Comprehensive outline may be employed, to equally good advantage, to introduce a description of a person. This is what Anthony Trollope uses in his unforgettable description of Mr Slope

Mr Slope is tall, and not ill made. His feet and hands are large, as has ever been the case with all his family, but he has a broad chest and wide shoulders to carry off these excrescences, and on the whole his figure is good. His countenance, however, is not specially prepossessing. His hair is lank, and of a dull pale reddish hue. It is always formed into three straight lumpy masses, each brushed with admirable precision, and cemented with much grease, two of them adhere closely to the sides of his face, and the other lies at right angles above them. He wears no whiskers, and is always punctiliously shaven. His face is nearly of the same color as his hair, though perhaps a little redder. It is not unlike beef—beef, however, one would say, of a bad quality. His forehead is capacious and high, but square and heavy, and unpleasantly shining. His mouth is large, though his lips are thin and bloodless, and his big, prominent, pale brown eyes inspire anything but confidence. His nose, however, is his redeeming feature. It is pronounced straight and well formed, though I myself should have liked it better did it not possess a somewhat spongy, porous appearance, as though it had been cleverly formed out of a red-colored cork.

I never could endure to shake hands with Mr Slope. A cold, clammy perspiration always exudes from him, the small drops are ever to be seen standing on his brow, and his friendly grasp is unpleasant.

—*Barchester Towers*, Chap IV

⁶ Published by Houghton Mifflin Co. Reprinted by courtesy of the author.

As was intimated in a previous paragraph, however, it is not always feasible to begin a description with a comprehensive outline of the object or scene described. The first thing which the observer notices is often not an all-inclusive fundamental image of the whole, but one salient characteristic, perhaps a detail of relatively small physical dimensions. Thus, in *Great Expectations*, the first thing which Dickens notices about Joe Gargery is not his general build, but his complexion.

Joe was a fair man, with curls of flaxen hair on each side of his smooth face, and with eyes of such a very undecided blue that they seemed to have somehow got mixed with their own whites. He was a mild, good natured, sweet tempered, easy-going, foolish, dear fellow—a sort of Hercules in strength, and also in weakness.

—*Great Expectations*, Chap. II

Similarly, in *David Copperfield*, the first thing which Dickens observes about the street in which Traddles lives is not its general outline, but its untidiness.

I found that the street was not as desirable a one as I could have wished it to be, for the sake of Traddles. The inhabitants appeared to have a propensity to throw any little trifles they were not in want of, into the road, which not only made it rank and sloppy, but untidy too, on account of the cabbage leaves. The refuse was not wholly vegetable either, for I myself saw a shoe, a doubled up saucepan, a black bonnet, and an umbrella, in various stages of decomposition, as I was looking out for the number I wanted.

An indescribable character of faded gentility attached to the house I sought, and made it unlike all the other houses in the street—though they were all built on one monotonous pattern, and looked like the early copies of a blundering boy who was learning to make houses, and had not yet got out of his cramped brick and mortar pothooks.

—*David Copperfield*, Chap. XXVII

Accentuation and suppression—

To return to our original thesis regarding coherent arrangement in description, we may say that the average careful observer will note some details first, some details later, and some details not at all. In other words, description—even the most realistic description—is much more analogous to painting than to photography. As a matter of fact, literal truth is not always artistic truth. A painting is subjectively more realistic than a photograph, since the abiding impressions are made upon the imagination rather than upon the physical eye. Psychologically, we do not ever sense nearly all of the objects we see, sounds we hear, odors we smell, and so on. It has been said of one of our contemporary American novelists that he cannot describe a lady's boudoir without delineating every hairpin on the dresser. Such a method of description is faithfully true photographically, but grossly false artistically. It is, in short, as bewilderingly incoherent as it is wearisomely prolix. When we set out to write a description, we are not obliged to state the facts, all the facts, and nothing but the facts, rather, we are bound to accentuate the important, subdue the less important, and suppress the totally insignificant.

Interdependence of details—

Certain details in any given picture are interdependent. They are not merely contiguous, they are also vitally related to one another. As one authority states the matter, the descriptive artist may get some of his very best effects "by leaning one detail against another"⁷. A keen appreciation of this fact is shown by H. G. Wells in the following passage from *Ann Veronica*.

⁷ Greenough & Hersey *English Composition*, p. 141

Miss Miniver looked out upon the world through large emotional blue eyes that were further magnified by the glasses she wore. Her glasses moved quickly as her glance traveled from face to face⁸

—Chap II

In particular, notice how much less effective Mr Wells would have been if he had said "Miss Miniver *had* large emotional blue eyes and *wore* glasses." An equally good example of the effective leaning of one detail against another is to be found in the following passage from Dickens's *Bleak House*

As the bell was yet ringing and the people were not yet come, I had leisure to glance over the church, which smelt as earthy as a grave, and to think what a shady, ancient, solemn little church it was. The windows, heavily shaded by trees, admitted a subdued light that made the faces around me pale, and darkened the old brasses in the pavement, and the time and damp worn monuments

—Chap XVIII

In the foregoing passage, note how the light from the windows affects the people and the objects in the church, and how, in turn, the trees outside affect the light which enters at the windows

EXERCISES

1 Study the selections on pages 284, 287, 292, 295, 296, 297, 298, 299, and 300, with special reference to the arrangement of details. Do any of these descriptions begin with a "fundamental image"? Why is the beginning of the description on page 296 particularly effective?

2 Study the passages on pages 284-300, with special reference to the choice and accentuation of details

⁸ Published by Harper & Brothers. Reprinted by courtesy of the author

3 Study the last passage on page 293 with special reference to the interdependence of details

4 Write a description in which you begin with a fundamental image or comprehensive outline

5 Write a description in which you begin with a striking detail of relatively small physical dimensions

6 Reread several of your descriptions to determine whether you have included any details which do not add to the vividness of the picture Have you sufficiently accentuated the most salient details? Have you—especially in connection with Exercises 7 and 8, on page 266—inadvertently used too much exposition?

7 What phases of individualization, viewpoint, dominant tone, and coherence do you find in descriptive passages appended to other chapters of this book? Do any of the appended passages contain an excessive amount of exposition? Make a written or an oral report covering all or part of the investigations which you have conducted in connection with this exercise

5 DESCRIPTION AS BACKGROUND FOR NARRATIVE

The meager, the massed, or the interwoven background?—

The one phase of descriptive technique which remains to be considered is the use of description as a background for narrative Since this matter will be discussed fully in Chapter 12, we shall only touch upon it here If the student will trace the evolution of the English novel from the days of Samuel Richardson to the end of the nineteenth century, he will find that, roughly speaking, there have been three kinds of backgrounds for fictional narrative first, the meager background, second, the massed background, and third, the interwoven background The period of meager background is coextensive with the sixty years which intervened between the inception of the modern English novel and the end of the eighteenth century,

that is, the typical eighteenth century novelist cared as little for pictorial effects as did the typical eighteenth-century poet. Then came the Romantic Period with its profuse coloring, and with it we find the tendency of novelists to halt their narration at frequent intervals in order to indulge in lengthy and detailed descriptions of characters and backgrounds. Finally, a little before the middle of the nineteenth century, comes the tendency to interweave background more and more skilfully with narration.

The meager background is, of course, altogether unsatisfying to the modern reader. One reason—perhaps the chief reason—why *Pamela* bores us is that Richardson helps us very little to visualize characters and backgrounds. Scott is much more satisfying, but Scott is too much like the God of the eighteenth-century deist, in that he winds up his universe and expects it to run itself thenceforth. In other words, the massed background is inadequate not only because it wearies the reader by halting the narrative, but also because it presents the entire picture at once and expects the reader to retain that picture clearly for several hundred pages. The interwoven background, which found greater and greater favor as the Victorian Period advanced, keeps the narrative moving and at the same time reveals the picture bit by bit, often vivifying the picture by skilful reiteration. During the years that have intervened since the end of the nineteenth century, the interwoven background has been improved in detail, but hardly in general method or principle. With the futuristic cult who are apparently trying to get back to Richardsonian colorlessness, we need not here be concerned.

6 THE NEW CONTEST OF DESCRIPTION

Description, during the past century, has become increasingly purposeful. In the past, it has been used because it has been inevitably linked with the action, as in *Robinson Crusoe*, or because it has been ornamental, as in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, or because the writer has wished to make the moods of nature harmonize with the moods of the characters or be in contrast to them, as is so often true in the novels of Dickens, or because an author has a detached interest in some remote historical period, as Scott in *Quentin Durward* and other novels. Although all of these older purposes of description still remain, powerful new interests have arisen.

Description influenced by science—

As decade has followed decade, the world and the universe have been ransacked more and more insistently for their hidden treasures and mysteries. Men of scientific mind—physicists, chemists, biologists, geologists, and psychologists—in ever-increasing numbers have all been engaged in discovering the world of nature, in attempting to plumb the depths of human personality, in enlarging generally the bounds of human nature over its terrestrial environment. This eager curiosity about the mystery of life has stimulated a demand for an exact description of things as they are, as nearly as that reality may be determined. Creative writers have been caught by the spirit of their times. Poets, short story writers, and novelists have become vitally interested in the phenomena of the earth as it relates to man. A chief instrument for presenting their findings has naturally been description. Although the interests of these authors have been variegated, two main interests stand forth prominently (1) a socio-

logical interest and (2) a philosophical interest which, based on modern biology, geology, psychology, and other sciences, concerns itself with man's significance in the universe. These two interests often come close together. Let us consider, briefly, each of them.

Sociological interest—

It is a noteworthy fact that the realists did not become enthusiastic describers until the last half of the nineteenth century. Maria Edgeworth and Jane Austen, both realists, wrote novels during the life of Scott. Although description is present in their novels, yet it is astonishingly meager as compared with his. After 1840, however, novels dealing with contemporary life abound in description. Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, John Galsworthy, H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, Henry James, and William Dean Howells all draw heavily upon it. Why this distinction between the earlier and the later realists? The answer seems to be that the newer novelists have been attempting to analyze social conditions in the modern scientific spirit, which insists upon facts. Through description concrete evidence is presented. And description makes the reader at his comfortable fireside visualize the environment and the life of the unfortunate souls far away in the tenement or the factory or the mine.

All told, the amount of description written for this purpose in recent years is enormous. Of an almost infinite number of possible illustrations let us examine only one, a description of Esther Waters, a servant girl whose hard lot George Moore analyzes in his best known novel.

She wore a faded yellow dress and a black jacket too warm for the day. A girl of twenty, short, strongly built, with short, strong arms. Her neck was plump, and her hair of so ordinary a brown that it passed unnoticed. The nose was too

thick, but the nostrils were well formed. The eyes were gray, luminous, and veiled with dark lashes. But it was only when she laughed that her face lost its habitual expression, which was somewhat sullen, then it flowed with bright humor. She laughed now, showing a white line of almond shaped teeth.⁹

—*Esther Waters*, Chap. I

Esther Waters is a far different person from Rowena, the aristocratic and altogether lovely heroine of Sir Walter Scott. The ancient knights used to go about seeking to succor fair ladies in distress. Those fair ladies were usually lovely aristocrats. The modern writer of fiction, on the other hand, is a more altruistic champion. He is prone to espouse the causes of the humble and the lowly, in addition, however, to many other social interests.

Philosophical interest—

Often closely related to the social interest of modern creative writers is a philosophical interest. Modern science has inspired in some of them a yearning to know the ultimate significance of man in the universe. With the promulgation of the evolution theory it has appeared that the history of life on this planet has been a history of bloody contest, not only of man against man, but of man against a relentless and cruel nature. Thomas Hardy is the most illustrious English novelist to be dominated by this view. According to him, man is the plaything of capricious circumstances, and is a very small part of a very large landscape, from which indeed he has, according to geologic standards, but recently emerged. Hardy's descriptions written in the somber mood engendered by this philosophy are justly famous. Let us examine first a passage of his which explains that mood and then a descriptive passage written by him when that mood was on

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Haggard Egdon appealed to a subtler and securer instinct, to a more recently learnt emotion, than that which responds to the sort of beauty called charming and fair

Indeed, it is a question if the exclusive reign of this orthodox beauty is not approaching its last quarter. The new Vale of Tempe may be a gaunt waste in Thule; human souls may find themselves in closer and closer harmony with external things wearing a somberness distasteful to our race when it was young. The time seems near, if it has not already arrived, when the chastened sublimity of a moor, a sea, or a mountain will be all of nature that is absolutely in keeping with the moods of the more thinking of mankind. And ultimately, to the commonest tourist, spots like Iceland may become what the vineyards and myrtle gardens of South Europe are to him now, and Heidelberg and Baden be passed unheeded as he hastens from the Alps to the sand dunes of Scheveningen.¹⁰

—*The Return of the Native*, Book I, Chap. I

A descriptive passage controlled by this mood follows

A Saturday afternoon in November was approaching the time of twilight, and the vast tract of unenclosed wild known as Egdon Heath embrowned itself moment by moment. Overhead the hollow stretch of whitish cloud shutting out the sky was a tent which had the whole heath for its floor.

The heaven being spread with this pallid screen and the earth with the darkest vegetation, their meeting line at the horizon was clearly marked. In such contrast the heath wore the appearance of an installment of night which had taken up its place before its astronomical hour was come. Darkness had to a great extent arrived hereon, while the day stood distinct in the sky. Looking upwards, a furze cutter would have been inclined to continue work, looking down, he would have decided to finish his faggot and go home. The distant rims of the world and of the firmament seemed to be a division in time no less than a division in matter. The face of the heath

¹⁰ Copyright 1878, Harper & Brothers. This and the following selection are reprinted by permission.

by its mere complexion added half an hour to evening it could in like manner retard the dawn, sadden noon, anticipate the frowning of storms scarcely generated, and intensify the opacity of a moonless midnight to a cause of shaking and dread

—The Return of the Native, Book I, Chap I

That the philosophic mood is not always somber like that of Thomas Hardy is manifest in the following poem of Harriet Monroe Here, reflection on the emergence of life from inorganic matter is occasion for a more joyous note

How wild, how witch like weird that life should be!
That the insensate rock dared dream of me,
And take to bursting out and burgeoning—
 Oh, long ago—yo ho!—
And wearing green! How stark and strange a thing
That life should be!

Oh, mystic mad, a rigadon of glee,
That dust should rise, and leap alive, and flee
A-foot, a-wing, and shake the deep with cries—
 Oh, far away—yo hay!—
What moony masque, what arrogant disguise
That life should be! ¹¹

Between the almost unrelieved gloom of Thomas Hardy and the joy of Harriet Monroe there are to be found in modern literature many subtle shades of feeling

The bearing of all this on the content of description should now, we trust, be clear Modern science has made writers look upon the variegated world about them with new eyes, to see man through a different perspective in relation to that world Whatever description they write,

¹¹ Reprinted from *You and I* by permission of The Macmillan Company (Copyright 1914) and by the courtesy of Miss Harriet Monroe

whether of external nature or of crowds or of human habitations, is likely to be influenced by the modern evolutionary conception of life. The mood engendered by it is controlling the selection of the details which go into descriptions. It is difficult to see how one dominated by the spirit of his age could escape being affected in one way or another by this mood. In a broad way, the age itself has a sort of dominant tone which is imparted to it by the findings of science and which controls directly or indirectly, in one way or another way, the descriptive utterances of reflective men.

A word may perhaps be hazarded here about the future of description. The feeling of scientific men is that we are just on the threshold of great discoveries about human personality, the constitution of matter, and the forces which control it. Nature, which is the external universe, will be seen in ever-changing lights and in new significances. This changing knowledge will occasion new moods, and new moods will evoke new descriptions of our terrestrial environment.

EXERCISES

1. Reveal the social conditions among the most unfortunate class of people in your community by describing, after personal observation, a single room or a single street or a single person.

2. Pick out real persons fairly representative of some social level or group. Describe them in an environment characteristic of them, ignoring neither the favorable nor the unfavorable details of their appearances. Neither flatter nor belittle. Choose from the following persons or select others.

a A sorority girl or a fraternity man

b A girl who is working her way in college by being a servant

- c* A college professor or student who affects an ultra modern point of view
- d* The man who runs the town
- e* A woman in politics
- f* An uneducated father who has a daughter in college

3 Taking such a point of view as will enable your eye to pass over a vast expanse of somber landscape, write a paragraph describing that landscape from the standpoint of one whose attitude has been profoundly touched by modern theories concerning the origin of life

4 Write a brief description of a crowded city street or of a crowd of students actively engaged in some pursuit, keeping in mind the vastness and the age of the universe

5 Spend two or three hours in reading some of Schopenhauer's essays. Then attempt a description of a group of people. Or if Schopenhauer does not move you, write a similar description under the influence of some other modern philosopher, or after you have heard a stimulating and challenging lecture on some scientific or philosophic subject

6 Write a description of the starry heavens after you have read one of the popular astronomical articles such as Dr Harlow Shapley, director of the Harvard Observatory, writes for the magazines

7 CONCLUSION

It must not be supposed from the present chapter that all modern writers describe according to rule or that they are all interested in precisely the same material. Such a standardization would be disastrous to literary art. As a matter of fact we find a great diversity among literary craftsmen in the matter of description. There are, for example, writers of today who are content with very meager descriptions, just as there are writers whose settings are somewhat massive. There is also diversity in

the fondness for natural scenery. Some writers adorn their narratives with scenes from nature, while others are interested only in people, cities, factories, houses, and the like. A few references to contemporary authors may be of interest. Thomas Hardy, as we have just seen, is much interested in describing man in his natural environment. Arnold Bennett, another realist, is not interested particularly in nature, but is deeply interested in man and the haunts of man. Joseph Conrad has written long descriptions of nature and of people, sometimes almost as long as Sir Walter Scott's, but different from his. Henry James is noted for his compressed descriptions, although upon occasion he may write long ones. Rose Macaulay in a twentieth century novel, *Potterism*, writes fiction almost as barren of description as were the novels of Samuel Richardson. Notwithstanding such individual variations, however, it is usually possible to distinguish modern description from the older description.

GENERAL EXERCISES

(In working up the following subjects, investigate such matters as the purposes of the description, its content, its technique, its extent, and the place where it is found.)

1 Compare the descriptive passages in Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* and George Eliot's *Adam Bede*, noting the difference in the content and in the technique.

2 Compare the description in the historical novels Scott's *Ivanhoe* and *Talisman* and Maurice Hewlett's *Richard Yea and Nay*.

3 Compare the description in Smollett's *Peregrine Pickle*, Cooper's *The Red Rover*, and Conrad's *The Nigger of the Narcissus*.

4 Study Hardy's *The Return of the Native*, investigating the technique of the description and the uses to which it is put.

5 Compare the description in Dickens's *Nicholas Nickleby*, Wells's *Joan and Peter*, and Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*

6 Compare the description in Dickens's *Great Expectations* with that in Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*, an English and a Russian novel written about the same time

7 Study the description in the following realistic novels written at different periods: *Castle Rackrent* by Maria Edgeworth, *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, *The Mill on the Floss* by George Eliot, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* by William Dean Howells, *Arrowsmith* by Sinclair Lewis, *The White Monkey* by John Galsworthy, *Vein of Iron* by Ellen Glasgow, and *Far Forest* by Francis Brett Young

8 Compare the description in *Daisy Miller* and *The Passionate Pilgrim*, both written by Henry James. Compare the description in *The Point of Honor* with that in *Lord Jim*, both written by Conrad

9 Compare the description in Anthony Trollope's *Barchester Towers* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, two novels written about the same time

10 Compare the description in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Charles Reade's *Foul Play*, Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, and Conrad's *Victory*

11 Compare the description in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, George Moore's *Esther Waters*, and Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*

12 Compare the description in Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Masfield's *Dauber*, and Noyes's *Drake*

13 Compare the description in Fielding's *Tom Jones*, Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, Galsworthy's *Fraternity*, and Bennett's *Riceman Steps*

14 Study the description of the characters and places in the opening chapters of a selected list of famous novels. Include novels of Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, Scott, Jane Austen, Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot, Hawthorne, Hardy, Meredith, Stevenson, Howells, Henry James, Wells, Galsworthy, and Bennett

ILLUSTRATIVE SELECTIONS

A STREET IN NEW YORK

They drove accidentally through one street that seemed gayer in the perspective than an L road. The fire escapes, with their light iron balconies and ladders of iron, decorated the lofty house fronts; the roadway and sidewalks and door steps swarmed with children, women's heads seemed to show at every window. In the basements, over which flights of high stone steps led to the tenements, were green grocers' shops abounding in cabbages, and provision stores running chiefly to bacon and sausages, and cobblers' and tanners' shops, and the like, in proportion to the small needs of a poor neighborhood. Ash barrels lined the sidewalks, and garbage heaps filled the gutters, teams of all trades stood idly about, a peddler of cheap fruit urged his cart through the street, and mixed his cry with the joyous screams and shouts of the children and the scolding and gossiping voices of the women, the burly blue bulk of a policeman defined itself at the corner, a drunkard zigzagged down the sidewalk toward him. It was not the abode of the extremest poverty, but of a poverty as hopeless as any in the world, transmitting itself from generation to generation, and establishing conditions of permanency to which human life adjusts itself as it does to those of some incurable disease, like leprosy.¹²

—William Dean Howells *A Hazard of New Fortunes*,
Part I, Chap. IX

A DAY COACH AT NIGHT

One warm damp June night the Denver Express was speeding westward across the earthy smelling plains of Iowa. The lights in the day coach were turned low and the ventilators were open, admitting showers of soot and dust upon the occupants of the narrow green plush chairs which were tilted at various angles of discomfort. In each of these chairs some un-

¹² Reprinted by permission of Miss Mildred Howells and Harper & Brothers. Copyright 1889

comfortable human being lay drawn up, or stretched out, or writhing from one position to another. There were tired men in rumpled shirts, their necks bare and their suspenders down, old women with their heads tied up in black handkerchiefs, bedraggled young women who went to sleep while they were nursing their babies and forgot to button up their dresses, dirty boys who added to the general discomfort by taking off their boots. The brakeman, when he came through at mid night, sniffed the heavy air disdainfully and looked up at the ventilators. As he glanced down the double rows of contorted figures, he saw one pair of eyes that were wide open and bright, a yellow head that was not overcome by the stupefying heat and smell in the car. "There's a girl for you," he thought as he stopped by Thea's chair.

'Like to have the window up a little?' he asked.

Thea smiled up at him, not misunderstanding his friendliness. "The girl behind me is sick, she can't stand a draft. What time is it, please?"

He took out his open-faced watch and held it before her eyes with a knowing look. "In a hurry?" he asked. "I'll leave the end door open and air you out. Catch a wink, the time'll go faster."

Thea nodded good night to him and settled her head back on her pillow, looking up at the oil lamps.¹³

—Willa Cather *The Song of the Lark*, Part II, Chap. VIII

ROSE DUTCHER ENTERS CHICAGO

Almost 6 o'clock, and the train due in Chicago at 6:30! The city grew more formidable to Rose as she approached it. She wondered how it would first appear on the plain. There was little sign of it yet.

As she looked out of the car-window she saw men stacking grain, and ploughing. It was supper-time at home, and John was just rising from the table. The calves were bleating for their pails of milk, the guinea-hens were clacking, and the

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little turkeys crying in the grass, the bees were homing, heavy with honey, and here she sat, rushing toward that appalling and unimaginable presence—Chicago

Somewhere just ahead it sat, this mighty hive of a million and a half people. The thought of it made her heart beat quick, and her throat filled. She was going there, the lake was there, art was there, and music and the drama—and love! Always under each motion, always behind every success, was the understanding that love was to be the woman's reward and recompense. It was not articulate nor feverish, this thought, it was a deep, pure emotion, streaming always toward the unknown.

She dreamed as the train rumbled on. She would succeed, she *must* succeed. She gripped the seat-rail with her broad, strong hands, and braced herself like one entering a flood.

It was this wonderful thing again, a fresh, young, and powerful soul rushing to a great city, a shining atom of steel obeying the magnet, a clear rivulet from the hills hurrying to the sea. On every train at that same hour, from every direction, others, like her, were entering on the same search, to the same end.

"See that cloud?" someone said, "that's Chicago."

Rose looked—far to the southeast a gigantic smoke cloud soared above the low horizon line, in shape like an eagle, whose hovering wings extended from south to east, trailing mysterious shadows upon the earth. The sun lighted its mighty crest with crimson light, and its gloom and glow became each moment more sharply contrasted. Toward this portentous presence the train rushed, uttering an occasional shrill neigh, like a stallion's defiance.

The brazen bell upon the engine began to clang and clang, small towns of scattered wooden houses came into view and were left behind. Huge, misshapen buildings appeared in flat spaces, amid hundreds of cars. Webs of railway tracks spread out dangerously in acres of marvellous intricacy, amid which men moved, sooty, grimy, sullen, and sickly.

Terrors thickened. Smells assaulted her sensitive nostrils,

incomprehensible and horrible odors Everywhere men delved in dirt and murk and all unloveliness Streets began to stretch away on either side, interminable, squalid, filled with scowling, squaw like women and elfish children The darkness grew, making the tangle and tumult a deadly struggle

Was this the city of her dreams? This the magnificent, the home of education and art?

The engine's bell seemed to call back "Good cheer! good cheer!" The buildings grew mightier but not less gloomy, the freight cars grew fewer, and the coaches more numerous It was an illimitable jungle filled with unrecognizable forms, over which night was falling

A man with a hoop of clinking checks came through He was a handsome, brisk, and manly fellow, and his calm, kindly voice helped Rose to choke down her dread

"Baggage checked!—Baggage, baggage checked to any part of the city Baggage!"

In him she saw the native denizen to whom all these horrors were commonplace sensations, and it helped her It couldn't be so bad as it looked to her

"Chicago, She caw go!" called the brakeman, and her heart for a moment stood still, and a smothering sensation came upon her She was at the gate of the city, and life with all its terrors and triumphs seemed just before her ¹⁴

—Hamlin Garland *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly*, Chap XV

THE THREE MARINERS

Very few persons were now in the street, and his eyes, by a sort of attraction, turned and dwelt upon a spot about a hundred yards further down It was the house to which the writer of the note had gone—the Three Mariners—whose two prominent gables, bow window, and passage-light could be seen from where he stood Having kept his eyes on it for a while, he strolled in that direction

This ancient house of accommodation for man and beast,

¹⁴ Copyright, 1895, Harper & Brothers Reprinted by permission

now, unfortunately, pulled down, was built of mellow sand stone, with mullioned windows of the same material, markedly out of perpendicular from the settlement of foundations. The bay window projecting into the street, whose interior was so popular among the frequenters of the inn, was closed with shutters, in each of which appeared a heart shaped aperture, somewhat more attenuated in the right and left ventricles than is seen in Nature. Inside these illuminated holes, at a distance of about three inches, were ranged at this hour, as every passer knew, the ruddy polls of Billy Wills the glazier, Smart the shoemaker, Buzzford the general dealer, and others of a secondary set of worthies, of a grade somewhat below that of the diners at the Kings Arms, each with his yard of clay.

A four centered Tudor arch was over the entrance, and over the arch the signboard, now visible in the rays of an opposite lamp. Hereon the Mariners, who had been represented by the artist as persons of two dimensions only—in other words, flat as a shadow—were standing in a row in paralyzed attitudes. Being on the sunny side of the street, the three comrades had suffered largely from warping, splitting, fading, and shrinkage, so that they were but a half invisible film upon the reality of the grain, and knots, and nails, which composed the signboard. As a matter of fact, this state of things was not so much owing to Stannidge the landlord's neglect, as from the lack of a painter in Casterbridge who would undertake to reproduce the features of men so traditional.

A long, narrow, dimly-lit passage gave access to the inn, within which passage the horses going to their stalls at the back, and the coming and departing human guests, rubbed shoulders indiscriminately, the latter running no slight risk of having their toes trodden upon by the animals. The good stabling and the good ale of the Mariners, though somewhat difficult to reach on account of their being but this narrow way to both, were nevertheless perseveringly sought out by the sagacious old heads who knew what was what in Casterbridge.

Henchard stood without the inn for a few instants, then

lowering the dignity of his presence as much as possible by buttoning the brown holland coat over his shirt front, and in other ways toning himself down to his ordinary every day appearance, he entered the inn door¹⁵

—Thomas Hardy *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Chap VI

ST GEORGE'S LIBRARY

St George was in his shirt sleeves in the middle of a large high room—a room without windows, but with a wide skylight at the top, that of a place of exhibition. It was furnished as a library, and the serried book shelves rose to the ceiling, a surface of incomparable tone produced by dimly gilt "backs" interrupted here and there by the suspension of old prints and drawings. At the end furthest from the door of admission was a tall desk, of great extent, at which the person using it could write only in the erect posture of a clerk in a counting house, and stretched from the entrance to this structure was a wide plain band of crimson cloth, as straight as a garden path and almost as long, where, in his mind's eye, Paul at once beheld the Master pace to and fro during vexed hours—hours, that is, of admirable composition¹⁶

—Henry James *The Lesson of the Master*, Chap V

HOME OF THE COREYS

The Coreys were one of the few old families who lingered in Bellingham Place, the handsome, quiet old street which the sympathetic observer must grieve to see abandoned to boarding houses. The dwellings are stately and tall, and the whole place wears an air of aristocratic seclusion, which Mrs. Corey's father might well have thought assured when he left her his house there at his death. It is one of two evidently designed by the same architect who built some houses in a characteristic taste on Beacon Street opposite the Common. It has a wooden portico, with slender fluted columns, which have always been painted white, and which, with the delicate mouldings of the

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cornice, form the sole and sufficient decoration of the street front, nothing could be simpler, and nothing could be better. Within, the architect has again indulged his preference for the classic, the roof of the vestibule, wide and low, rests on marble columns, slim and fluted like the wooden columns without, and an ample staircase climbs in a graceful, easy curve from the tessellated pavement. Some carved Venetian *scrigni* stretched along the wall, a rug lay at the foot of the stairs, but otherwise the simple adequacy of the architectural intention had been respected, and the place looked bare to the eyes of the Laphams when they entered.¹⁷

—William Dean Howells *The Rise of Silas Lapham*,
Chap. XIV

THE LAPHAM DRAWING-ROOM

The Lapham drawing room in Nankeen Square was in the parti colored paint which the Colonel had hoped to repeat in his new house, the trim of the doors and windows was in light green and the panels in salmon, the walls were a plain tint of French gray paper, divided by gilt mouldings into broad panels with a wide strip of red velvet paper running up the corners, the chandelier was of massive imitation bronze, the mirror over the mantel rested on a fringed mantel cover of green reps, and heavy curtains of that stuff hung from gilt lambrequin frames at the window, the carpet was of a small pattern in crude green, which, at the time Mrs. Lapham bought it, covered half the new floors in Boston. In the panelled spaces on the walls were some stone colored landscapes, representing the mountains and cañons of the West, which the Colonel and his wife had visited on one of the early official railroad excursions. In front of the long windows looking into the Square were statues, kneeling figures which turned their backs upon the company within doors, and represented allegories of Faith and Prayer to people without. A white marble group of several figures, expressing an Italian

¹⁷ This and the two following selections are reprinted by permission of and arrangement with Houghton Mifflin Company

conception of Lincoln Freeing the Slaves,—a Latin negio and his wife,—with our Eagle flapping his wings in approval, at Lincoln's feet, occupied one corner, and balanced the what not of an earlier period in another. These phantasms added their chill to that imparted by the tone of the walls, the landscapes, and the carpets, and contributed to the violence of the contrast when the chandelier was lighted up full glare, and the heat of the whole furnace welled up from the registers into the quivering atmosphere on one of the rare occasions when the Laphams invited company.

—William Dean Howells *The Rise of Silas Lapham*,
Chap. XVI

A BOSTON RESTAURANT

Marcia had never dined in a restaurant, and she was somewhat bewildered by the one into which they turned. There was a great show of roast, and steak, and fish, and game, and squash and cranberry pie in the window, and at the door a tack was driven through a mass of bills of fare, two of which Bartley plucked off as they entered, with a knowing air, and then threw on the floor when he found the same thing on the table. The table had a marble top, and a silver-plated castor in the center. The plates were laid with a coarse red doily in a cocked hat on each, and a thinly plated knife and fork crossed beneath it, the plates were thick and heavy, the handle as well as the blade of the knife was metal, and silvered. Besides the castor, there was a bottle of Leicester shire sauce on the table, and salt in what Marcia thought a pepper box, the marble was of an unctuous translucence in places, and showed the course of the cleansing napkin on its smeared surface. The place was hot, and full of confused smells of cooking, all the tables were crowded, so that they found places with difficulty, and pale, plain girls, of the Provincial and Irish-American type, in fashionable bangs and pull-backs, went about taking the orders, which they wailed out toward a semicircular hole opening upon a counter at the farther end of the room, there they received the dishes ordered,

and hurried with them to the customers, before whom they laid them with a noisy clacking of the heavy crockery. A great many of the people seemed to be taking hulled corn and milk, baked beans formed another favorite dish, and squash pie was in large request. Maicia was not critical, roast turkey for Bartley and stewed chicken for herself, with cranberry pie for both, seemed to her a very good and sufficient dinner, and better than they ought to have had. She asked Bartley if this were anything like Parker's, he had always talked to her about Parker's.

—William Dean Howells *A Modern Instance*, Chap. XIV

CAPTAIN COSTIGAN

General or Captain Costigan—for the latter was the rank which he preferred to assume—was seated in the window with the newspaper held before him at arm's length. The Captain's eyes were somewhat dim, and he was spelling the paper, with the help of his lips, as well as of those bloodshot eyes of his, as you see gentlemen do to whom reading is a rare and difficult occupation. His hat was cocked very much on one ear, and as one of his feet lay up in the window seat, the observer of such matter might remark, by the size and shabbiness of the boots which the Captain wore, that times did not go very well with him. Poverty seems as if it were disposed, before it takes possession of a man entirely, to attack his extremities first: the coverings of his head, feet, and hands, are its first prey. All these parts of the Captain's person were particularly rakish and shabby. As soon as he saw Pen he descended from the window seat and saluted the new comer, first in a military manner, by conveying a couple of his fingers (covered with a broken black glove) to his hat, and then removing that ornament altogether. The Captain was inclined to be bald, but he brought a quantity of lank iron-gray hair over his pate, and had a couple of wisps of the same falling down on each side of his face. Much whiskey had spoiled what complexion Mr. Costigan may have possessed in his youth. His once handsome face had now a copper tinge. He wore a very high

stock, scarred and stained in many places, and a dress coat tightly buttoned up in those parts where the buttons had not parted company from the garment

—William Makepeace Thackeray *Pendennis*, Chap V

JOE GARGERY AS PENMAN

At my own writing table, pushed into a corner and cumbered with little bottles, Joe now sat down to his great work, first choosing a pen from the pen tray as if it were a chest of large tools, and tucking up his sleeves as if he were going to wield a crowbar or sledge hammer. It was necessary for Joe to hold on heavily to the table with his left elbow, and to get his right leg well out behind him, before he could begin, and when he did begin he made every down stroke so slowly that it might have been six feet long, while at every up stroke I could hear his pen spluttering extensively. He had a curious idea that the inkstand was on the side of him where it was not, and constantly dipped his pen into space, and seemed quite satisfied with the result. Occasionally he was tripped up by some orthographical stumblingblock, but on the whole he got on very well indeed, and when he had signed his name, and had removed a finishing blot from the paper to the crown of his head with his two fore fingers, he got up and hovered about the table, trying the effect of his performance from various points of view as it lay there, with unbounded satisfaction

—Charles Dickens *Great Expectations*, Chap LVII

FREDERICK DORRIT

He stooped a great deal, and plodded along in a slow preoccupied manner, which made the bustling London thoroughfare no very safe resort for him. He was dirtily and meanly dressed, in a threadbare coat, once blue, reaching to his ankles and buttoned to his chin, where it vanished in the pale ghost of a velvet collar. A piece of red cloth with which that phantom had been stiffened in its lifetime was now laid bare, and poked itself up, at the back of the old man's neck, into a confusion of gray hair and rusty stock and buckle which alto-

gether nearly poked his hat off. A greasy hat it was, and a napless, impending over his eyes, cracked and crumpled at the brim, and with a wisp of pocket-handkerchief dangling out below it. His trousers were so long and loose and his shoes so clumsy and large, that he shuffled like an elephant, though how much of this was gait, and how much trailing cloth and leather, no one could have told. Under one arm he carried a limp and worn out case, containing some wind instrument, in the same hand he had a pennyworth of snuff in a little packet of whitey-brown paper, from which he slowly comforted his poor old blue nose with a lengthened out pinch, as Arthur Clennam looked at him.

—Charles Dickens *Little Dorrit*, Chap. VIII

THE SIRE DE MALETROIT

On a high chair beside the chimney, and directly facing Denis as he entered, sat a little old gentleman in a fur tippet. He sat with his legs crossed and his hands folded, and a cup of spiced wine stood by his elbow on a bracket on the wall. His countenance had a strongly masculine cast, not properly human, but such as we see in the bull, the goat, or the domestic boar, something equivocal and wheedling, something greedy, brutal, and dangerous. The upper lip was inordinately full, as though swollen by a blow or a toothache, and the smile, the peaked eyebrows, and the small, strong eyes were quaintly and almost comically evil in expression. Beautiful white hair hung straight all around his head, like a saint's, and fell in a single curl upon the tippet. His beard and moustache were the pink of venerable sweetness. Age, probably in consequence of inordinate precautions, had left no mark upon his hands, and the Maletroit hand was famous. It would be difficult to imagine anything at once so fleshy and so delicate in design, the taper, sensual fingers were like those of one of Leonardo's women, the fork of the thumb made a dimpled protuberance when closed, the nails were perfectly shaped, and of a dead, surprising whiteness. It rendered his aspect tenfold more redoubtable, that a man with

hands like these should keep them devoutly folded like a virgin martyr—that a man with so intense and startling an expression of face should sit patiently on his seat and contemplate people with an unwinking stare, like a god, or a god's statue His quiescence seemed ironical and treacherous, it fitted so poorly with his looks¹⁸

—Robert Louis Stevenson *The Sne de Maletroit's Door*,
in *New Arabian Nights*

MICHAEL FURZE

Then (Klitch often afterwards remembered the exact circumstances) his shop bell rang, the door opened and a man came in He was tall, broad and stout He was wearing an ulster and carried a shabby brown bag This last he at once put down on a sham Chippendale chair and said "Mr Herbert Klitch? His voice, even as revealed by those few words, was remarkable It had a resonance quite unusual, so that you felt that it was carried on in a series of reverberating echoes Nevertheless, its tone was tunefully deep and true

"Yes, that's me," said Klitch ungrammatically

"Ah," said the man Then he took off his ulster "Just as though," Klitch said afterwards, "he meant to stay for the night" He smiled a broad and beaming smile This should have been friendly and yet was not altogether so As Klitch very quickly noticed, the man was in many ways a series of contradictions He was big and should have given an impression of great strength, but there was too much flesh on his bones His head was finely shaped, but the cheeks were flabby, the mouth too small The eyes were large and friendly but also a little sly His most remarkable feature was his nose, which was unusually long, fleshy about the nostrils, and gave the impression, as some noses do, that it had a life independent of the rest of the face His coloring was fair and he had an untidy light brown moustache

The moment that Klitch really looked at him he said to himself, "Now where have I seen that nose before?"

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The stranger stood with his legs apart and began to talk¹⁹
—Hugh Walpole *The Inquisitor*, Chap I

ANN'S NEW YORK APARTMENT

Ann had a living room with the clean, hard, efficient brightness of steel and cement and prickly plaster. Tall windows with metal mullions. From them you could see the East River, and hear the beckoning hoarseness of steamers which she imagined were outbound for Seville and Gotteborg and Mangalore. Unyielding floors of linoleum laid in cement. High walls—straight walls that went meekly up and up to a ceiling of rigidly squared beams enclosed in plaster.

She had made it as human as she could with her small store of kind, human, old things. The lounge on which Professor Vickers had slept on Sunday afternoons. His set of Dickens. The *David Copperfield* that she had read every year since she was ten. The *Water Babies* that he had given her, and *Idylls of the King* with Glenn Hargis's signature. Four soft chairs, and little tables, and lights by the chairs so that you could read. Shelves of brown dim books about criminology and penology and psychology and all the dim desperate sciences in which she sought wisdom.

Beyond this tall living-room was a bedroom rather smaller than she had had in Waubesa, Ill., and a bathroom so small that she had only a shower bath. And the kitchenette—New York was the greatest city in the world, so she had no room for a spacious stove or a line of copper pots, but there was ever such a nice electric coffee percolator, and she had a large tomcat named Jones.²⁰

—Sinclair Lewis *Ann Vickers*, pp 401–402

DR JACOB MEDHURST

He raised himself, puffing and cumbrous, from the great gilt armchair. When he stood, John was astonished to see

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²⁰ Copyright 1933 Doubleday, Doran & Co., Inc. Reprinted by permission

that the leonine head, the massive torso and the prominent paunch were supported by unusually short legs and tiny feet, presenting a figure that resembled one of Leslie Ward's caricatures in *Vanity Fair*. It was of about the same height as Cartwright's, in a grosser, sensualized version which lacked the hard compactness of that grizzled tough little man, and the resemblance was emphasized by the fact that he wore a short-tailed frock coat with grease spotted silk revers, like Cartwright's operating coat, though the plump hands which protruded from starched cuffs, frayed at the edge, were as different from the surgeon's as could well be imagined.

As he came to himself, Dr Medhurst's face, which until now had seemed anything but inviting, grew good humored in a blurred Falstaffian fashion, but the good humor, John Bradley noticed, did not extend to his small eyes, which were yellowish and suffused, like those of a cigar smoker, and remained shrewd and hard²¹

—Francis Brett Young *Dr Bradley Remembers*, pp 162–163

DR BRADLEY'S DISPENSARY

Beyond this partition—so low that, even when he was dispensing, the crown of Dr Bradley's bald scalp draped with wispy white hair could be seen moving to and fro mysteriously illuminated by the play of colors cast on it from the stock-bottles' rainbow contents—lay an elongated chamber which the direct light of day never penetrated an arcanum perpetually dim (save when the single, disintegrating incandescent mantle glowed white) and haunted by the melancholy music of a leaking tap from which water dripped persistently into a sink whose lining had once been of white glazed porcelain but now, streaked by acids and blotched with medicaments and eaten away at last by the tap's dripping torture, suggested uses less sanitary than those it fulfilled. Against this visual impression the doubtful observer was happily reassured by the composite odor with which the dispensary's air

²¹ Copyright, 1938, Reynal & Hitchcock Reprinted by permission

was drenched Subtly different from that which pervades a chemist's shop with its vitiating hints of perfumes and soaps and cosmetics, the air of Dr Bradley's dispensary possessed a tang of its own Unmistakable, unforgettable, to those who have breathed it, it was the essence of General Practice, the smell diffused by innumerable floating molecules, aromatic oils—orange, cardamoms, lavender, peppermint, spiritous wafts of absolute alcohol, choking ether, heavy sweet chloroform, pungent whiffs of ergot and sour valerian, of hot acids, flat alkalis—the whole body of medicinal odors upheld and suspended, as it were, in an air already cleansed and purified by strong antiseptics This composite odor satiated Dr Bradley's clothes and clung to his person It was just as well, perhaps, that the dispensary partition was low and that it was also permitted to escape and to combat and overcome those all too human emanations of working clothes and soiled bandages which—particularly when nights were damp and the benches were crowded—emerged from the waiting room and filled the consulting room²²

—Francis Brett Young *Dr Bradley Remembers*, pp 1-2

AN ENGLISH VILLAGE RAILWAY STATION

Charming appeared the last word one would choose for Skeynes station It represented what might be called Mid-Victorian functional railway architecture, as far removed from the Gothic romanticism of Shrewsbury on the one hand as it was from the modern station with circular booking office, elliptical signal boxes and stepped-back waiting-rooms on the other There was a decent squat row of gray brick offices with wooden floors which were watered from time to time during the hot weather to lay the dust that they engendered, the booking office and entrance hall still contained one of those advertisements, now much valued by connoisseurs, of a storage and removal firm whose vans had the peculiar property of exhibiting one side and one end simultaneously, the

²² Copyright 1938 Reynal & Hitchcock Reprinted by permission

station master had a little office chokingly heated by a stove with a red hot iron chimney and furnished with yellowing crackling documents impaled on spikes, there was a waiting-room containing a bench, a table, an empty carafe of incredible thickness and weight, two chairs and a rusty grate full of smouldering slack, and the porters had a room called Lamps which was always locked, and at the end of the down platform was a tank on four legs from which local engines still obtained their water supply through a leathern hose pipe. There were a few little flower beds, edged with whitewashed stones and containing varieties of flowers from penny packets of mixed seeds. On the wooden fence that separated the platform from the station yard was another prize for the amateur of railway art, enamelled on tin, a fine original example of the distich about the Pickwick, Owl and Waverley pens. The platform was sheltered by a corrugated iron roof with a wooden frill along its front and all the paint was an uncompromising chocolate color.²³

—Angela Thirkell *Before Lunch*, pp 26–27

A NOVICE WITH NICOTINE

Next day, after luncheon, George Hardy went to the top of the Rectory orchard that he might secretly train himself to a pipe. His teeth held it deep and awkwardly, and his face, with its slash of brown hair over a hard, freckled forehead and its eyelids drawn down as he cautiously sheltered his match, had the character of a face carved in wood, lively and solid, by a sculptor eager for bones, and better pleased by a blunt angle than by a curve. Neither his father nor Helen would find him here, the pear trees happily intervening, and he paced the uppermost path with determination, sending up more smoke from his bowl than he was willing to draw into his mouth.²⁴

—Charles Morgan *Sparkenbroke*, Chap IV

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A LONDON CHARTISTS' MEETING

The hall was a large one, and when they entered they found it packed with people. The air was thick with the warm smell of human bodies, the odor from the oil lamps, figures were indistinct—here a face, there an arm, a body flung forward—everywhere an almost ecstatic excitement and attention. Kraft, Lunt, and Pider went to sit on the platform, Adam and Margaret were pressed into the wall near the door. Adam thought that he had never seen such eye-strained faces, men and women and some children, one baby held aloft and waving its chubby fists in the air.

It had just begun when they entered. The Chairman, a round tubby man with thick gray side whiskers, was speaking. The atmosphere was at present quiet and controlled. He said something about the conditions of the time, the oppression of the authorities, the iniquities of the Bread Tax, the Six Points of the new Charter. He sat down, and a long thin fellow with a straggly beard got up. He had a rather weak, piping voice and no very impressive manner. He began quietly, so there were voices from the hall. "Speak up! We can't hear!" and a rough growl from someone. "Sit down, damn ye, if yer can't talk!"²⁵

—Hugh Walpole, *The Fortress*, Part II, Chap. II

SPRING IN ENGLAND

In the space of the last three days the aspect of the country had changed, the green flame had quickened in the hedgerows, the last drifts of blackthorn had vanished like thawing snows beneath a sun that flooded the foxy gorses and king cup hollows with gold, lambs basked in the fields, as white as new blown daisies, under a pale blue, cuckoo-haunted sky, and timid foals trotted clumsily to the shelter of their mothers' swishing tails as the van rolled past.²⁶

—Francis Brett Young *The Redlakes*, Book III, Chap. VII

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²⁶ Copyright 1930, Harper & Brothers. Reprinted by permission.

The Description of Action

☞ THE PORTRAYAL OF PERSONS and of things in repose or in motion with the emphasis on their appearance is commonly called description. When the persons move about in the environment where they are placed, when they have ambitions or fears which guide their conduct, when they assist or oppose each other, or are threatened by their environment or untoward circumstances—when, in short, the emphasis is upon action—the relation of the events is called narration. The distinction, though convenient, is somewhat arbitrary, inasmuch as the demand for description by no means ceases when the characters, described in repose, begin to act. The action itself calls for description. What is the action of narrative but characters and things in motion—the selfsame persons and things which in repose demanded description? If their appearance demands description in repose, how much more does it demand description when they are in action?

Narration a special kind of description—

Any narrative consists of a series of constantly changing pictures, as the motion pictures abundantly testify. In

the motion pictures there is the background of town, or room, or landscape. In the foreground move the actors, their gestures, their facial expressions, their motions, their costumes, and their possessions constantly changing in time and space and calling for portrayal. Motion may be *described* for the reason that *things* move, motion itself as a quality cannot be seen. Motion, in fact, demands description because it involves an alteration in the appearance of things—an alteration which is to be apprehended only by the senses. Action itself is manifested as an ever-changing appearance. From this point of view narration becomes a special kind of description—the description of things in motion. Narration, then, consists of a series of related but constantly changing pictures or appearances moving forward to a goal determined by the author.

The analysis of a novel or a short story discloses the fact that the passages genuinely involving action are somewhat more limited than may at first be supposed. First, at the outset of the narrative and distributed through it, are description and exposition to unfold the characters, the place, and the situation, and to present the author's interpretation of events. Second, there is dialogue, which is not itself action, but which frequently culminates in action after the motives of the speakers are revealed. Third, there are the crises and climaxes, which are prepared for by exposition, by description, and by dialogue. These crises and climaxes, sometimes few and far between, constitute the action. We have already considered the description of characters and of places in repose. It now becomes our purpose to consider the description which accompanies the dialogue and the action.

1 DESCRIPTION IN DIALOGUE

Elsewhere we have discussed what we have termed interwoven description. Hitherto, however, the emphasis has

been placed on the distribution of the descriptive passages through the action and through the dialogue so that they would not come *en masse* and thereby weary the reader. The principle thus far set forth has been that the descriptive passages, after a certain limit has been reached, must be tucked away in odd corners of the narrative and be delivered piecemeal. The description interwoven in dialogue, however, has a more positive significance than the foregoing remarks might lead one to suppose. It has, first, the very concrete use of enlivening the dialogue and fixing it in the mind. It has, secondly, the use of making the dialogue seem truer to life. A speaker in life is usually engaged in some occupation, however trivial, while he talks. Writers, accordingly, imitate life in this respect. The heroine may be shelling peas or knitting. The hero may be eating his breakfast or cleaning his pipe. Such picturesque touches give reality to the conversation.

Description an aid to realism—

The third use of description in dialogue is more important than the uses just mentioned, and deserves separate consideration. This use grows out of the most important use of dialogue itself. Dialogue must directly advance the action of the story. Two characters meet under circumstances which are dramatic or which become dramatic. One character unfolds to the other information hitherto unknown to him. The second character thus learns, for example, that a person whom he has regarded as his friend is his enemy or that an act which he has considered brutally selfish is divinely kind. In the course of the conversation his whole attitude has changed. He will do something which he did not intend to do, or he will not do something which he did intend to do. He has been aroused from a passive state of mind to an intensely dynamic state of mind, or he has been changed from hatred

to love or from love to hatred, or other transformations mild or violent have occurred. As the dialogue progresses and intensifies, the facial expression changes, the unconscious acts and gestures betray the moods of the personages, and the pitch of the voice varies in accordance with the altering emotions. All the range of feeling from mirth to pity, sympathy, love, scorn, and anger may be manifested by the gleam of the eye or the posture of the body. All of these changes in mood call for skilful description, a description which calls for as refined a technique as any other kind of description.

The following passage from Poe's *The Cask of Amontillado* will illustrate how intimately description may be blended with dialogue.

The gait of my friend was unsteady, and the bells upon his cap jingled as he strode

"The pipe," he said

"It is farther on," said I, "but observe the white web work which gleams from these cavern walls"

He turned toward me, and looked into my eyes with two filmy orbs that distilled the rheum of intoxication

"Niter?" he asked at length

"Niter," I replied. "How long have you had that cough?"

"Ugh! ugh! ugh!—ugh! ugh! ugh!—ugh! ugh! ugh!—ugh! ugh! ugh! ugh! ugh!"

My poor friend found it impossible to reply for many minutes

"It is nothing," he said, at last

"Come," I said, with decision, "we will go back, your health is precious. You are rich, respected, admired, beloved, you are happy as once I was. You are a man to be missed. For me it is no matter. We will go back, you will be ill, and I cannot be responsible. Besides, there is Luchesi—"

"Enough," he said, "the cough is a mere nothing, it will not kill me. I shall not die of a cough."

"True—true," I replied, "and, indeed, I had no intention of alarming you unnecessarily—but you should use all proper caution. A draught of this Medoc will defend us from the damp."

Here I knocked off the neck of a bottle which I drew from a long row of its fellows that lay upon the mould.

"Drink," I said, presenting him the wine.

He raised it to his lips with a leer. He paused and nodded to me familiarly, while his bells jingled.

'I drink,' he said, 'to the buried that repose around us.'

"And I drink to your long life."

He again took my arm, and we proceeded.

"These vaults," he said, "are extensive."

"The Montresors," I replied, "were a great and numerous family."

"I forget your arms."

"A huge human foot d'or, in a field azure, the foot crushes a serpent rampant whose fangs are embedded in the heel."

'And the motto?'

"*Nemo me impune lacessit*."

"Good!" he replied.

The wine sparkled in his eyes and the bells jingled. My own fancy grew warm with the Medoc. We had passed through walls of piled bones, with casks and puncheons intermingling, into the inmost recesses of the catacombs. I paused again, and this time I made bold to seize Fortunato by an arm above the elbow.

"The niter!" I said, "see, it increases. It hangs like moss upon the vaults. We are below the river's bed. The drops of moisture trickle among the bones. Come, we will go back ere it is too late. Your cough—!"

"It is nothing," he said, "let us go on. But first, another draught of the Medoc."

I broke and reached him a flask of De Grâve. He emptied it at a breath. His eyes flashed with a fierce light. He laughed and threw the bottle upward with a gesticulation I did not understand.

I looked at him in surprise. He repeated the movement—a grotesque one.

"You do not comprehend?" he said.

"Not I," I replied.

"Then you are not of the brotherhood?"

"How?"

"You are not of the masons?"

"Yes, yes," I said, "yes, yes."

"You? Impossible! A mason?"

"A mason, I replied.

"A sign," he said.

"It is this," I answered, producing a trowel from beneath the folds of my *roquelaure*.

"You jest," he exclaimed, recoiling a few paces. "But let us proceed to the Amontillado."

"Be it so," I said, replacing the tool beneath the cloak, and again offering him my arm. He leaned upon it heavily. We continued our route in search of the Amontillado. We passed through a range of low arches, descended, passed on, and descending again, arrived at a deep crypt, in which the foulness of the air caused our flambeaux rather to glow than flame.

The description in this passage of dialogue has two chief uses. In the first place, it is used to describe the dark and gloomy vaults of the Montresors. It will be noted that even the dialogue itself is used to carry the description. Characters have to talk about something, and naturally authors often have them talk about their surroundings, just as people talk about their surroundings in real life. Poe uses the device here with great effectiveness, as he happily combines the description of the niter-covered walls of the catacombs with a heightening of the emotional intensity of his narrative. In the second place, the description is used to portray Fortunato as he is led onward to his doom. Here we see him, not as he might appear within the frame of a picture on the wall, but as he

appeared under most unusual circumstances. We see him as he and his companion find their way through the gloom of the catacombs. On the floor are bones and wine casks intermingled. The walls are dripping with moisture. Fortunato has bells on his cap which jingle as he passes on with unsteady gait. There is at first a film in his eyes. Later under the influence of wine his eyes sparkle and then flash with a fierce light. With a grotesque movement he throws upward a bottle. His companion startles him presently by drawing a towel from under the folds of his cloak, and Fortunato recoils. Then, leaning heavily on the arm of his companion, he proceeds onward. Thus they advance through a range of low arches, their way dimly lighted by a torch.

We have exhibited in previous chapters famous portraits of characters in repose. There are equally famous portraits of persons in dramatic situations. The latter portraits differ, necessarily, from the former in that they are presented in fragments. They cannot come in blocks as the initial descriptions of characters often come in the opening chapters of a novel. None the less this gradual unfolding does not preclude their being portraits.

As a final proof of the importance of description in dialogue we may point to the fact that before the advent of the talkies the motion picture was enabled to dispense, to a large extent, with dialogue. It depended on gesture, facial expression, bodily posture—in general, on the appearance of persons—to transmit thoughts and intentions. In other words, it depended on what in writing would be description. Note also what happens on the legitimate stage. All the art and appearance of the skilled actor—his manner, his gestures, his poses, his expression, the modulation of his voice, his costume—call for description when reduced to print. And writers of fiction, we may

be sure, are by no means forgetful of the appearance of their characters when they throw them into dramatic situations

EXERCISES

1 In *Mr. Prodger's Call*, pp 327-328, and in *Bianca and the Model*, p 331, to what extent are the personalities and mental states of the characters revealed through description and to what extent through dialogue?

2 Make a list of five or more of the best novels you have ever read. Pick out the most significant passages of dialogue contained in them, study the description interspersed through the dialogue, and report in a paper the results of your investigation.

3 Jot down in a notebook descriptions of actual persons as they engage in conversation. Observe the facial expression, the gestures, the quality of voice, and anything else which reveals the personality and mood of the speakers. Then write a series of brief but vivid portraits of the various persons, concerning yourself exclusively with their conversational characteristics and mannerisms.

4 Recall a passage of dramatic dialogue which you have read in some novel or short story a few months ago. Try to reproduce the conversation without consulting the original. Then compare your version with the authentic version.

5 Choose from the following subjects. Work up the situations you choose with dialogue and description.

- a The scene is a classroom. A meek freshman girl sits with downcast eyes, afraid to speak. A waggish instructor goads her by his witticisms until she flashes forth in speech.
- b A father who does not approve of smoking arrives unexpectedly in his son's room at college, where many signs of smoking are in evidence. The son and possibly a friend or possibly several friends are there.
- c A man visits a distinguished physician to consult him.

about an ailment which he believes to be trifling
He learns that he has a deadly disease

- d* A young man boards a day coach of an express train, sits down by a stranger, and in a breezy manner begins a conversation. He soon learns that this man is a distinguished senator. The senator does not manifest much interest in the conversation. In fact, he shows a positive inclination to discontinue it. The youth, however, resolves to take advantage of the opportunity to fraternize with greatness.
- e* A dignified college president, meditating concerning weighty college problems, has his hair cut by a talkative barber.
- f* An impertinent young girl tries to discover the age of an unwedded friend much older than she, and unusually tender about her age.
- g* A solemn college professor and a rural bricklayer have a wordy encounter when their automobiles collide on a country road.
- h* An instructor in wrestling—a Swede—is hunting. He has a dog and a gun. He is met by an irate farmer's wife with a shotgun. She is enraged about his presuming to hunt on her land.

2 DESCRIPTION IN CLIMAX AND CRISIS

Preparation for the action—

And now let us consider the action itself. Even in the most stirring tale, action does not by any means continually occur. It must be prepared for. First there must be exposition of the situation and descriptions of the characters and of the scene. Also there must be dialogue to determine the relations of the characters to each other and to supply them with motives. Thus in almost any novel there are oases of action with exposition and dialogue in between. The action, when it does come, is likely to be

dramatic—a fight, a murder a deed of courage, an escape, a pathetic attempt and failure to achieve some goal, a rescue, or some other deed where the emotions are stirred. Many novels have very few scenes like this. In such a novel, for example, as Galsworthy's *Fraternity*, the suspense arises out of character rather than action. The characters misunderstand each other or have secret desires or hidden springs of action which affect the lives of others. The novel progresses by a gradual revelation of these inner motives through dialogue. Dialogue succeeds dialogue with ever increasing suspense. On the other hand, in a novel of adventure like *Treasure Island* the scenes of action are more frequent, although even here there are numerous hiatuses bridged over by description, exposition, and dialogue. Thus, all in all, the real action of a novel is likely to be more limited than at first might be supposed.

Description needed to vivify the climax—

An examination of the big dramatic moments in great novels shows that description plays an important part in them just as it does in dialogue, and for the same reasons. The author is interested in depicting the appearances of persons and of things in dramatic situations because the reader has a curiosity altogether human to know how things look in times of stress. "What do the characters wear?" is one of the questions in which the reader is interested. If they have daggers, ornaments, or other possessions, what do these possessions look like? If a man speaks at the moment he expects death, what does his voice sound like? If a man is suddenly confronted with a great danger, what is the expression of his face, the look in his eye, or the instinctive gesture? If he moves toward his enemy, how does he appear when he so moves? These few ques-

tions, among dozens which might be asked, suggest the imperative need for description at a climax of the action

The description which comes at such a time is not likely to be connected nor prolonged, but it will be vivid. One who passes through a crisis in real life has stamped upon his consciousness certain unforgettable impressions. Certain sharply defined images of things burn their way into his mind and linger there. At such a moment all of the sensibilities are abnormally awake and are focused on the outcome of one event. Persons and objects are seen in unusual aspects and with the greatest intensity. Likewise in books the reader is carried away with the characters during a crisis. Then, if ever, he is snatched away from himself and lives in the imaginary world of the author, identified momentarily with the characters. All of his senses are alert as if he himself were going through the experiences which are being related. It is likely, therefore, that the reader sees more vividly the objects described at a climax and remembers them longer than he does objects described at other parts of the narrative. Literature is full of pictures stamped forever upon the memory by virtue of vivid descriptive touches used by the authors to heighten the dramatic effect of their crises and climaxes. The art of the describer here reaches its culmination.

The famous climax in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* where Rawdon Crawley so unexpectedly and dramatically experiences his triumph over Lord Steyne will serve to show the nature of description in a moment of intense action.

Rawdon left her and walked home rapidly. It was nine o'clock at night. He ran across the streets, and the great squares of *Vanity Fair*, and at length came up breathless opposite his own house. He started back and fell against the railings, trembling as he looked up. The drawing-room win-

dows were blazing with light She had said that she was in bed and ill He stood there for some time, the light from the rooms on his pale face

He took out his door-key and let himself into the house He could hear laughter in the upper rooms He was in the ball dress in which he had been captured the night before He went silently up the stairs, leaning against the banisters at the stair head — Nobody was stirring in the house besides—all the servants had been sent away Rawdon heard laughter within—laughter and singing Becky was singing a snatch of the song of the night before, a hoarse voice shouted "Brava! Brava!"—it was Lord Steyne's

Rawdon opened the door and went in A little table with a dinner was laid out—and wine and plate Steyne was hanging over the sofa on which Becky sat The wretched woman was in a brilliant full toilette, her arms and all her fingers sparkling with bracelets and rings, and the brilliants on her breast which Steyne had given her He had her hand in his, and was bowing over it to kiss it, when Becky started up with a faint scream as she caught sight of Rawdon's white face At the next instant she tried to smile, a horrid smile, as if to welcome her husband and Steyne rose up, grinding his teeth, pale, and with fury in his looks

He, too, attempted a laugh—and came forward holding out his hand "What, come back! How d'ye do, Crawley?" he said, the nerves of his mouth twitching as he tried to grin at the intruder

There was that in Rawdon's face which caused Becky to fling herself before him "I am innocent, Rawdon," she said, "before God, I am innocent" She clung hold of his coat, of his hands, her own were all covered with serpents, and rings, and baubles "I am innocent Say I am innocent," she said to Lord Steyne

He thought a trap had been laid for him, and was as furious with the wife as with the husband "You innocent! Damn you," he screamed out "You innocent! Why every trinket you have on your body is paid for by me I have

given you thousands of pounds which this fellow has spent, and for which he has sold you Innocent, by——! You're as innocent as your mother, the ballet girl, and your husband, the bully Don't think to frighten me as you have done others Make way, sir, and let me pass", and Lord Steyne seized up his hat, and, with flame in his eyes, and looking his enemy fiercely in the face, marched upon him, never for a moment doubting that the other would give way

But Rawdon Crawley, springing out, seized him by the neckcloth, until Steyne, almost strangled, writhed, and bent under his aim "You lie, you dog!" said Rawdon "You lie, you coward and villain!" And he struck the Peer twice over the face with his open hand, and flung him bleeding to the ground It was all done before Rebecca could interpose She stood there trembling before him She admired her husband, strong, brave, and victorious

"Come here," he said She came up at once

"Take off those things She began, trembling, pulling the jewels from her arms, and the rings from her shaking fingers and held them all in a heap, quivering and looking up at him "Throw them down," he said, and she dropped them He tore the diamond ornament out of her breast, and flung it at Lord Steyne It cut him on his bald forehead Steyne wore the scar to his dying day

—Vol II, Chap XVIII

This passage consists of dialogue, of description, and of action It will be noted in the first place that the purely descriptive content exceeds in quantity the parts devoted to action And it will be noted in the second place that even the parts devoted to action have a descriptive element and that it is this descriptive element which gives vividness and coloring to them Take, for example, the sentence at the very heart of the climax *But Rawdon Crawley, springing out, seized him by the neckcloth, until Steyne, almost strangled, writhed, and bent under his arm*

This is action, but it is a picture, an appearance. Rawdon Crawley *springs out*. Is it not intended that we see Rawdon Crawley here in a certain condition just as much as it was intended that we see him in the ball dress mentioned a few paragraphs above? The truth of the matter is that description and action are blended so as almost to defy analysis.

Dynamic description inherent in action—

Just what is demanded of a writer when he presents an action? I may say *he went*, and that statement truly records an action, but a colorless action. Such colorless statements will never do in vivid and artistic narrative. What is demanded is a pictorial representation of moving things. As soon as I say *he tottered across the room*, I am giving my statement a pictorial value, or, in other words, a descriptive value. Such description may conveniently be termed *dynamic* description as opposed to what may be termed *static* description, the portrayal of things in repose. Dynamic description is the heart and soul of successful narrative. The following paragraph from Joseph Conrad's novel *Victory* will illustrate how extensively the record of action is sometimes based upon description. The picture of Ricardo, although it may not be a portrait suitable for framing and hanging on the wall, is none the less a picture. It reveals Ricardo not as if a life mask had been made of him, but as he appeared at one of the most dramatic moments of his life.

Ricardo drew back one foot and pressed his elbows close to his sides, his chest started heaving convulsively, as if he were wrestling or running a race, his body began to sway gently back and forth. The self-restraint was at an end, his psychology must have its way. The instinct for the feral spring could no longer be denied. Ravish or kill—it was all

one to him, as long as by the act he liberated the suffering soul of savagery repressed for so long. After a quick glance over his shoulder, which hunters of big game tell us no lion or tiger omits before charging home, Ricardo charged, head down, straight at the curtain. The stuff, tossed up violently by his rush, settled itself with a slow, floating descent into vertical folds, motionless, without a shudder even, in the still, warm air¹

—Part IV, Chap. I

Description, then, is needed to give action intenseness. Without description, narration becomes a colorless recital of events. It is a knowledge of this need for description that many an inexperienced writer lacks. The novice is not likely to see that the events which happened in five minutes may require a whole chapter to relate. The average college freshman is appalled when he is told to write a narrative of six hundred words about an action of two or three minutes' duration. The solution is often a matter of description rather than of narration. The narrative writer, just as the descriptive writer, must develop his powers of observation. All of his senses must be awake. He must transfer to fiction all the variety of his own sensations, for much of his material is to be found in the appearance of persons and things in real life. He must study persons at dramatic moments—the baseball player when he is at bat in the ninth inning with the bases filled, two men out, and the score a tie, or the football player when he lunges for a tackle in the open field, or a friend when he has just been driven to the wall in a heated argument, or a prisoner on the witness stand when the prosecuting attorney has reached a crucial stage in the cross-examination, or persons in numerous other situations that try their mettle and test their souls. He must

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then transfer the material that results from his observation to his imaginary characters, remembering that description is most welcome to the reader and makes the most profound impression upon him when the action is at its height. The initial description of a character, necessary though it be, is comparable to meeting a stranger. A description of the same character when he is passing through a trying ordeal has the same effect as observing a friend or an enemy when he is passing through a crisis.

Relation of description to suspense—

The consideration of dynamic description leads us to another but related phase of the discussion, and that is the vital element of suspense. Without suspense, a narrative, whether a novel or a short story, loses its prime cause of being. The relation of description to suspense is intimate and inevitable. In the first place description is useful because it is one of the means employed to retard the solution of the conflict. The author at any time he chooses can terminate the suspense by announcing the outcome. Lew Wallace, for example, can announce at any time he wishes that Ben Hur won the chariot race. It is not the *fact* that the reader enjoys, but the *suspense* itself. Description is one of the most effective means of prolonging this suspense. But it has a much more positive use than this rather negative use. It heightens the suspense. Suppose that the characters are passing through a crisis, such as, for example, the famous chariot race in *Ben Hur*. It is by description that the varying effects of the contest on the spectators and the participants are recorded, for it is by a vivid description of their looks and of the sounds of their voices that we measure their emotions—emotions which are transferred to us, the readers. It is by description that we are made to see the things that inspire these

emotions, the flying horses and chariots rushing through clouds of dust and the white-faced charioteer. In other words, it is description more than any other means used in this account of the chariot race that arouses in the reader his intentness. Here at the height of the reader's interest and at the very crest of the action he is made to see a picture, which will be stamped upon his mind with unusual vividness because of his excited mental state, and which, being gradually but swiftly unfolded, occasions his suspense. A narrative scene painted by the brush on the canvas is not exciting, because it may be seen all at once. It has no progression, it is only a cross section of the action. A pen picture has a powerful advantage over a painted picture, because it depicts the details of an event in their chronological sequence, just as they come in life itself.

EXERCISES

1 Underline the descriptive words of *The Transformation*, p. 325, *The Death of a Pirate*, p. 325, *The Tragedy of Pondicherry Lodge*, pp. 328-329, *A Crisis*, pp. 329-331.

2 Make a list of five or more of the best novels you have ever read. Pick out the crucial situations and study the description.

3 By means of vivid description impart a pictorial quality and suspense to a crucial moment of a baseball game, a football game, or some other athletic contest.

4 Make a list of ten or more tense moments from your own past experiences—moments not necessarily involving your personal safety, but involving your pride, your good name, or your good fortune. From this list choose the subject which you think you can turn into the best narrative. Impart a pictorial quality and suspense by description.

5 Choose from the following subjects for narrative themes. Impart a pictorial quality and suspense by description.

- a* A young man (or woman) is present at a banquet where many distinguished people are gathered. He (or she) is unexpectedly called upon to make a speech.
- b* The automobile that two girls are driving refuses to run at the intersection of two busy city streets. An American Legion parade is almost upon them.
- c* A young husband and wife have with them at the theater their three year old daughter. The play is an extremely serious one. At the most solemn moment of all the young daughter raises a lusty howl.
- d* A vast crowd of people have assembled at an aviation field to see the races. The people are specially interested in a distinguished aviator. His plane cannot stand the strain of the tremendous speed which it attains and suddenly bursts while it is high in the sky.
- e* Two bandits enter a garage to commit a robbery. They think the decrepit-looking, gray-haired man in charge is an easy mark. He, however, is an old Indian fighter. He brings them to time.
- f* The same old man of the preceding situation is to be awarded a medal at a large public concourse of people. He arrives with his aged wife, both much frightened at the impending ordeal.
- g* A baby on a train swallows an open safety pin, which lodges in the child's throat. Only one kind of instrument will remove the pin, and that must be used speedily. A doctor and a queer looking old lady who happen to be on board, the conductor, and a surgeon summoned from the next city are the heroes.

3 EXPOSITION AND DESCRIPTION IN NARRATION

Before we come to the discussion of the last step in the present chapter, the relation of description to the plot as a whole, it will be necessary first to consider the importance to narrative of another type of discourse, namely, exposition. Description reaches the emotions and stirs them

through an appeal to the senses Exposition, generally more calm and dispassionate, functions through an appeal to the mind Description deals with the external appearances of things in narration Exposition deals with the internal world in the mind of the characters and of the author, with those abstract and spiritual qualities that are not material It has to do with the inner springs of motive that explain why characters act as they do For instance, in a psychological novel the reader is interested not in the outcome of a significant deed like a chariot race, but in the outcome of a spiritual conflict

Narration a composite of description and exposition—

It would be difficult to weigh the relative importance of exposition and of description in narration That importance obviously varies in the works of different writers In George Meredith's novels the exposition probably outweighs the description On the other hand, in the works of Joseph Conrad and of the two French writers Flaubert and Maupassant, the description probably outweighs the exposition, for they have deliberately adopted as a principle of their technique the revealing of mental states through external appearances—a descriptive process Their underlying purpose may be expository in its nature, but their means is descriptive Their assumption is that just as in real life one cannot enter the consciousness of another person and discover what is going on within, but must judge an inward state by external appearances, so in fiction one should not be conducted to a mental world inaccessible in real life, but should be led to judge it by the same evidences as in actual experience Accordingly, the character and the character's acts are vividly pictured, but the reader is left to determine for himself the motives Such a point of view gives an added importance to descrip-

tion, and, indeed, has exerted an influence upon many modern writers. In most fiction, however, both description and exposition are freely used and are harmoniously blended at any given stage of the narrative. So fundamental are they that, to a surprising degree, narration becomes a composite of description and exposition, as we shall see in the next step of the discussion.

EXERCISES

1 In *At the Apothecary's*, p. 326, *Mr Prodder's Call*, pp. 327-328, *A Crisis*, pp. 329-331, *Bianca and the Model*, pp. 331-332, *A Winter Afternoon in Chicago*, p. 332, and *Harry Nilson*, p. 333, how much do the authors depend upon description and how much upon direct exposition to reveal psychological states and traits of character?

2 Two or more friends in their room in a dormitory debate whether they shall attend a football game at another college. Show by description and dialogue, without stating the facts in so many words, that one of them is indecisive in character and that another is a leading spirit.

3 An aspiring journalist applies to the manager of one of the departments of a newspaper for a position. Show, without stating the fact in so many words, that the young man has in his character a strange combination of persistence and of lack of confidence.

4 Write a character sketch of a friend or a relative well known to you. Put this person in a situation that will test him and bring out his dominant traits by dialogue (if necessary) and by description. Do not state those traits in so many words.

5 Put yourself, under a fictitious name if you desire, into a situation and reveal what you think are conflicting traits in your character, without stating in so many words what those traits are.

4 RELATION OF DESCRIPTION TO PLOT

Action alone not of compelling interest—

The plot of a novel or of a short story usually may be stated in a short paragraph. The mere statement of the plot, however, does not occasion suspense. No one is emotionally stirred by the perusal of a plot. So far as the plot is concerned a colorless man is launched into a colorless contest in a colorless place and is associated with colorless people who do colorless things in a colorless way. Yet the plot is the essence of the action. It is what is left of the narrative after the description and the exposition have been taken from it, or, rather, it is the narrative before it has been amplified by description and exposition. The narrative becomes of real human interest only when the situations are prepared for by description and exposition, only when the situations are elaborated upon by these two means, only, in short, when the skilful narrator spins out the plot in a series of vivid and lifelike scenes, each scene gaining in intensity from the scenes which have gone before.

It is often difficult for the inexperienced writer to realize how slowly the action is expended and how far a little of it goes. To illustrate the process of building up a story from a plot we shall analyze Joseph Conrad's *Victory*. This novel, we believe, is fairly representative, for even though Conrad may be more vividly descriptive than are most novelists, his procedure in the main is typical. We have chosen it for the purpose because it is a conspicuous example of the kind of novel which is termed a novel of action. An examination reveals, however, that even in novels of action, the genuine action—that is, the performance of exciting deeds—is relatively small.

Victory is divided into four parts, thirty-nine chapters

in all, and contains four hundred and sixty-two pages. First let us examine the plot, and then see how the plot—the action unadorned and unexplained—is spun out into the completed tale.

THE PLOT OF CONRAD'S *Victory*

Axel Heyst, the hero, is hated by Schomberg, a German hotel keeper of Sourabaya in the Malay Archipelago. Schomberg has been forcing his attentions upon an English girl who is a member of an itinerant orchestra giving a series of performances at his hotel. Heyst, prompted by a chivalric impulse, rescues the girl and flees with her to the lonely island of Samburan, where he has lived in isolation from the world since a coal company, which had its seat there and of which he has been the manager, became defunct. Shortly after this event, a company of scoundrels arrive at Schomberg's hotel. They are Mr. Jones, a gentleman villain who hates women, Ricardo, his secretary and Pedro, their savage attendant. Schomberg, for the double purpose of dislodging them from his hotel and of avenging himself upon Heyst, finally persuades them to seek a hidden treasure which he tells them Heyst has secreted at Samburan. Mr. Jones, however, is not informed that there is a woman on the island. The villains reach Samburan just at a time when Heyst and the woman he has rescued are falling in love. Heyst, suspicious of their appearance, but not knowing their intentions, lodges them in the only available place, a bungalow near his own abode. At this critical juncture, Heyst's revolver is stolen from him by his Chinese servant Wang, so that an utterly defenceless man faces a well armed gang of cutthroats. Lena, the girl, who has now fallen deeply in love with Heyst, by strategy succeeds in getting a knife for him from Ricardo, who has become fascinated with her. This act, a triumph of love, an act which inspires a reciprocal love in Heyst, is the "victory." There is a tragic irony, however, in this victory, because the instant afterwards she is fatally wounded by Mr. Jones. The

tragedy is still further intensified by the fact that it occurs just at a moment when an avenue of escape seems to be opening up to her and Heyst, for Mr Jones finally has discovered the secret of her presence on the island and of Ricardo's passion for her. The discovery infuriates him against his secretary. Moreover, just after the crisis, a sea captain by name of Davidson, who has been the connecting link between Heyst and the outside world throughout the latter's isolation in Samburan, unexpectedly arrives, and could have given valuable assistance had he been an hour earlier. All of the principal characters die. Mr Jones kills Ricardo, and he himself is drowned in the sea. Wang kills Pedro. Heyst burns himself up by setting fire to his bungalow and by being consumed in the flames with the dead body of Lena.

Before we begin the discussion of Conrad's handling of this particular plot, we shall be aided by examining the definition of a novel which he makes in *A Personal Record* and which reveals his general method of handling his material. He says "And what is a novel if not a conviction of our fellowman's existence strong enough to take upon itself a form of imagined life clearer than reality and whose accumulated verisimilitude of selected episodes puts to shame the pride of documentary history." It is the phrase "accumulated verisimilitude of selected episodes" which *Victory* so well illustrates.

An analysis of each of the four parts follows. The seven chapters of Part I are devoted to showing only two chief points—namely, how Axel Heyst came to be on the island of Samburan with the heroine and how he came to have an enemy in Schomberg. Part II, consisting of eight chapters, is devoted to similarly limited phases of the action. It gives the inside history of Heyst's escape with Lena to Samburan, introduces the villains, and starts them in the direction of Samburan. Part III, consisting of ten chap-

ters, tells how Heyst and Lena fall in love and how the villains arrive and begin their nefarious work. Part IV, consisting of fourteen chapters, tells of the unequal struggle between the lovers and the villains and of the death of all concerned. Thus, each part develops a very definite and limited segment of the plot.

It is interesting, furthermore, to observe what Conrad might have emphasized and did not emphasize. He does not choose to give an account of Lena's flight with Heyst over several hundred miles of sea, as he is interested only in the cause of that flight. He does not tell us except in a remote and general way of the violent deaths of Jones, Ricardo, Wang, and Heyst. But the time and space saved by not elaborating upon these and other episodes within the range of the action are used to make vivid the episodes which he does choose—to make the "imagined life clearer than reality."

From two different points of view he presents vividly the circumstances which led to the flight of the hero and heroine. He uses two chapters to emphasize the hatred of Schomberg for Heyst, not to mention parts of other chapters devoted to the same purpose. He uses five chapters at the end of Part II to show what thorough-going villains the villains are and to get them started to Samburan. He devotes three chapters to the one episode of Ricardo's raid on Lena's room. Thus Conrad deliberately limits his material that he may have time to develop adequately the relatively few episodes which he thinks are most vital. It is his concentration upon them which gives the novel its intense and gripping interest. And a careful examination will disclose how dependent the interest is upon description—both static and dynamic description.

EXERCISES

1 Make a study of *Victory* in accordance with the foregoing discussion

2 Adopting the method used in the analysis of *Victory* make an investigation of *The Nigger of the Narcissus* by the same author, or of *The Return of the Native* by Thomas Hardy, or of *Fraternity* by John Galsworthy, or of *The Rise of Silas Lapham* by William Dean Howells. The investigation may be extended to other novels with profit

ILLUSTRATIVE SELECTIONS

THE TRANSFORMATION

He put the glass to his lips and drank at one gulp. A cry followed, he reeled, staggered, clutched at the table and held on, staring with injected eyes, gasping with open mouth, and as I looked there came, I thought, a change—he seemed to swell—his face became suddenly black and the features seemed to melt and alter—and the next moment, I had sprung to my feet and leaped back against the wall, my arm raised to shield me from that prodigy, my mind submerged in terror.

"O God!" I screamed, and "O God!" again and again, for there before my eyes—pale and shaken, and half fainting, and groping before him with his hands, like a man restored from death—there stood Henry Jekyll!²

—Robert Louis Stevenson *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*

THE DEATH OF A PIRATE

Owing to the cant of the vessel, the masts hung far out over the water, and from my perch on the cross-trees I had nothing below me but the surface of the bay. Hands, who was not so far up, was, in consequence, nearer to the ship, and fell between me and the bulwarks. He rose once to the surface in a lather of foam and blood, and then sank again for good.

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As the water settled, I could see him lying huddled together on the clean, bright sand in the shadow of the vessel's sides. A fish or two whipped past his body. Sometimes, by the quivering of the water, he appeared to move a little, as if he were trying to rise. But he was dead enough, for all that, being both shot and drowned, and was food for fish in the very place where he had designated my slaughter.

I was no sooner certain of this than I began to feel sick, faint, and terrified. The hot blood was running over my back and chest. The duk, where it had pinned my shoulder to the mast, seemed to burn like a hot iron, yet it was not so much these real sufferings that distressed me, for these, it seemed to me, I could bear without a murmur, it was the horror I had upon my mind of falling from a crosstree into that still, green water beside the body of the coxswain.³

—Robert Louis Stevenson *Treasure Island*, Chap. XXVII

AT THE APOTHECARY'S

They went in, and Lapham asked for something to make a nervous person sleep. Irene stood poring over the show case full of brushes and trinkets, while the apothecary put up the bromide, which he guessed would be about the best thing. She did not show any emotion, her face was like a stone, while her father's expressed the anguish of his sympathy. He looked as if he had not slept for a week, his fat eyelids drooped over his glassy eyes, and his cheeks and throat hung flaccid. He started as the apothecary's cat stole smoothly up and rubbed itself against his leg, and it was to him that the man said, "You want to take a table spoonful of that as long as you're awake. I guess it won't take a great many to fetch you."

"All right," said Lapham, and paid and went out. "I don't know but I *shall* want some of it," he said with a joyless laugh.

Irene came closer up to him and took his arm. He laid his

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heavy paw on her gloved fingers After a while she said, "I want you should let me go up to Lapham to morrow" ⁴

—William Dean Howells *The Rise of Silas Lapham*,
Chap XIX

MR PRODGER'S CALL

The door opened A middle aged, clean shaven, very well-dressed stranger stood bowing before them His bow was stately Milly saw it pleased Mother very much, she bowed her Queen Alexandra bow back As for Milly, she never could bow She smiled, feeling shy, but deeply interested

"Have I the pleasure," said the stranger very courteously, with a strong American accent, "of speaking with Mrs Wyndham Fawcett?"

"I am Mrs Fawcett," said Mother, graciously, "and this is my daughter, Mildred"

"Pleased to meet you, Miss Fawcett" And the stranger shot a fresh, chill hand at Milly, who grasped it just in time before it was gone again

"Won't you sit down?" said Mother, and she waved faintly at all the gilt chairs

"Thank you, I will," said the stranger

Down he sat, still solemn, crossing his legs, and most surprisingly, his arms as well His face looked at them over his dark arms as over a gate

"Milly, sit down, dear"

So Milly sat down, too, on the Madame Recamier couch, and traced a filet lace flower with a finger There was a little pause She saw the stranger swallow, Mother's fan opened and shut

Then he said, "I took the liberty of calling, Mrs Fawcett, because I had the pleasure of your husband's acquaintance in the States when he was lecturing there some years ago I should like very much to renoo—well—I venture to hope we might call it friendship Is he with you at present? Are you

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expecting him out? I noticed his name was not mentioned in the local paper. But I put that down to a foreign custom, perhaps—giving precedence to the lady.

And here the stranger looked as though he might be going to smile.

But as a matter of fact it was extremely awkward. Mother's mouth shook. Milly squeezed her hands between her knees, but she watched hard from under her eyebrows. Good, noble little Mummy! How Milly admired her as she heard her say, gently and quite simply, "I am sorry to say my husband died two years ago."

Mr. Prodder gave a great start. "Did he?" He thrust out his under lip, frowned, pondered. "I am truly sorry to hear that, Mrs. Fawcett. I hope you'll believe me when I say I had no idea your husband had—passed over."

"Of course." Mother softly stroked her skirt.⁵

—Katherine Mansfield *The Dove's Nest*

THE TRAGEDY OF PONDICHERRY LODGE

Sherlock Holmes took the lamp, and led the way, for Thaddeus Sholto's teeth were chattering in his head. So shaken was he that I had to pass my hand under his arm as we went up the stairs, for his knees were trembling under him. Twice as we ascended Holmes whipped his lens out of his pocket and carefully examined marks which appeared to me to be mere shapeless smudges of dust upon the cocoanut matting which served as a stair carpet. He walked slowly from step to step, holding the lamp low, and shooting keen glances to right and left. Miss Morstan had remained behind with the frightened housekeeper.

The third flight of stairs ended in a straight passage of some length, with a great picture in Indian tapestry upon the right of it and three doors upon the left. Holmes advanced along it in the same slow and methodical way, while we kept close at his heels, with our long black shadows streaming backward.

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down the corridor. The third door was that which we were seeking. Holmes knocked without receiving any answer, and then tried to turn the handle and force it open. It was locked on the inside, however, and by a broad and powerful bolt, as we could see when we set our lamp up against it. The key being turned, however, the hole was not entirely closed. Sherlock Holmes bent down to it, and instantly rose again with a sharp intaking of the breath.

"There is something devilish in this, Watson," said he, more moved than I had ever before seen him. "What do you make of it?"

I stooped to the hole, and recoiled in horror. Moonlight was streaming into the room, and it was bright with a vague and shiftily radiance. Looking straight at me, and suspended, as it were, in the air, for all beneath was in shadow, there hung a face—the very face of our companion Thaddeus. There was the same high, shining head, the same circular bristle of red hair, the same bloodless countenance. The features were set, however, in a horrible smile, a fixed and unnatural grin, which in that still and moonlit room was more jarring to the nerves than any scowl or contortion. So like was the face to that of our little friend that I looked round at him to make sure that he was indeed with us. Then I recalled to mind that he had mentioned to us that his brother and he were twins.⁶

—A Conan Doyle *The Sign of the Four*, Chap. V

A CRISIS

After that pause, he strode on again along the broad winding path through the Grove. What grand beeches! Adam delighted in a fine tree of all things, as the fisherman's sight is keenest on the sea, so Adam's perceptions were more at home with trees than with other objects. He kept them in his memory, as a painter does, with all the flecks and knots on their bark, all the curves and angles of their boughs, and had

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often calculated the height and contents of a trunk to a nicety, as he stood looking at it. No wonder that, notwithstanding his desire to get on, he could not help pausing to look at a curious large beech, which he had seen standing before him at a turning in the road, and convince himself that it was not two trees wedded together, but only one. For the rest of his life he remembered that moment when he was calmly examining the beech, as a man remembers his last glimpse of home where his youth was passed, before the road turned, and he saw it no more. The beech stood at the last turning before the Grove ended in an archway of boughs that let in the eastern light, and as Adam stepped away from the tree to continue his walk, his eyes fell on two figures about twenty yards before him.

He remained as motionless as a statue, and turned almost as pale. The two figures were standing opposite to each other, with clasped hands about to part, and while they were bending to kiss, Gyp, who had been running among the brushwood, came out, caught sight of them, and gave a sharp bark. They separated with a start—one hurried through the gate out of the Grove, and the other, turning round, walked slowly with a sort of saunter, toward Adam, who still stood transfixed and pale, clutching tighter the stick with which he held the basket of tools over his shoulder, and looking at the approaching figure with eyes in which amazement was fast becoming fierceness.

Arthur Donnithorne looked flushed and excited, he had tried to make unpleasant feelings more bearable by drinking a little more wine than usual at dinner to day, and was still enough under its flattering influence to think more lightly of this unwished-for rencontre with Adam than he would otherwise have done. After all, Adam was the best person who could happen to see him and Hetty together—he was a sensible fellow, and would not babble about it to other people. Arthur felt confident that he could laugh the thing off, and explain it away. And so he sauntered forward with elaborate carelessness—his flushed face, his evening dress of fine

cloth and fine linen, his hands half thrust into his waistcoat pockets, all shone upon by the strange evening light which the light clouds had caught up even to the zenith, and were now shedding down between the topmost branches above him

—George Eliot *Adam Bede*, Chap XXVII

BIANCA AND THE MODEL

The antagonism of all the long past months was now declared between these two—Bianca's pride could no longer conceal, the girl's submissiveness no longer obscure it. They stood like duellists, one on each side of the trunk—that common, brown-japanned, tin trunk coiled with rope. Bianca looked at it.

"You," she said, "and he? Ha, ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha!"

Against that cruel laughter—more poignant than a hundred homilies on caste, a thousand scornful words—the little model literally could not stand, she sat down in the low chair where she had evidently been sitting to watch the street. But as a taste of blood will infuriate a hound, so her own laughter seemed to bereave Bianca of all restraint.

"What do you imagine he's taking you for, girl? Only out of pity! It's not exactly the emotion to live on in exile. In exile—but that you do not understand!"

The little model staggered to her feet again. Her face had grown painfully red.

"He wants me!" she said.

"Wants you? As he wants his dinner. And when he's eaten it—what then? No, of course he'll never abandon you, his conscience is too tender. But you'll be round his neck—like this!" Bianca raised her arms, looped, and dragged them slowly down, as a mermaid's arms drag at a drowning sailor.

The little model stammered: "I'll do what he tells me! I'll do what he tells me!"

Bianca stood silent, looking at the girl, whose heaving breast and little peacock's feather, whose small round hands

twisting in front of her, and scent about her clothes, all seemed an offence

"And do you suppose that he'll tell you what he wants? Do you imagine *he'll* have the necessary brutality to get rid of you? He'll think himself bound to keep you till you leave him, as I suppose you will someday!"

The girl dropped her hands "I'll never leave him—never!" she cried out passionately

"Then Heaven help him!" said Bianca

The little model's eyes seemed to lose all pupil, like two chicoiy flowers that have no dark centers Through them, all that she was feeling struggled to find an outlet, but, too deep for words, those things would not pass her lips, utterly unused to express emotion She could only stammer

"I'm not—I m not—I will—" and press her hands again to her breast

Bianca's lip curled ⁷

—John Galsworthy *Fraternity*, Chap XXXIX

A WINTER AFTERNOON IN CHICAGO

When Thea emerged from the concert hall, Mrs Lorch's predictions had been fulfilled A furious gale was beating over the city from Lake Michigan The streets were full of cold, hurrying, angry people, running for street-cars and barking at each other The sun was setting in a clear, windy sky, that flamed with red as if it were a great fire somewhere on the edge of the city For almost the first time Thea was conscious of the city itself, of the congestion of life all about her, of the brutality and power of those streams that flowed in the streets, threatening to drive one under People jostled her, ran into her, poked her aside with their elbows, uttering angry exclamations She got on the wrong car and was roughly ejected by the conductor at a windy corner, in front of a saloon She stood there dazed and shivering The cars passed, screaming as they rounded curves, but either they

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were full to the doors, or were bound for places where she did not want to go. Her hands were so cold that she took off her tight kid gloves. The street lights began to gleam in the dusk. A young man came out of the saloon and stood eyeing her questioningly while he lit a cigarette. "Looking for a friend to night?" he asked. Thea drew up the collar of her cape and walked on a few paces. The young man shrugged his shoulders and drifted away.⁸

—Willa Cather *The Song of the Lark*, Part II, Chap. V

HARRY NILSON

"Yes." Jim looked closely at him, a small man, neatly dressed in a dark suit. His thick hair was combed straight down on each side from the top in a vain attempt to cover a white scar half an inch wide that lay horizontally over the right ear. The eyes were sharp and black, quick nervous eyes that moved constantly about—from Jim to the card, and up to a wall calendar, and to an alarm clock, and back to Jim. The nose was large, thick at the bridge and narrow at the point. The mouth might at one time have been full and soft, but habitual muscular tension had drawn it close and made a deep line of each lip. Although the man could not have been over forty, his face bore heavy parenthetical lines of resistance to attack. His hands were as nervous as his eyes, large hands, almost too big for his body, long fingers with spatulate ends and flat, thick nails. The hands moved about on the desk like the exploring hands of a blind man, feeling the edges of paper, following the corner of the desk, touching in turn each button on his vest.⁹

—John Steinbeck *In Dubious Battle*, p. 12

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PART IV ☞

The Art of Narration

The Story Writer's Background

☞ § SINCE A NARRATIVE IS A story, a record of events, there are several types of creative writing that come under the general head of narration. The epic, the metrical romance, the ballad, the drama, the novel, and the short story are all of them prominent types of fictitious narrative, just as the history, the biography, and the autobiography are salient types of factual narrative. On a lower, less pretentious level of narration, but just as clearly within the narrative field, stand the news story and the narrative of incident or personal experience.

The study of any one of these types is an interesting and a profitable study in itself, in fact, whole volumes have been devoted exclusively to the critical discussion of each one of these types.

Most college courses in creative narrative writing, however, are organized upon the assumption that the short story is the literary form which the undergraduate is most likely to handle with some degree of competence. This is probably a wise assumption, at any rate, it may be

taken for granted that the novel, the drama, and the literary biography are too difficult for the college freshman to attempt. This being the situation, the narrative section of *The College Writer* is devoted almost entirely to the short story.

1 THE COLLEGE SHORT-STORY COURSE

In spite of its obvious limitations, the college course in the short story has two advantages that justify its existence. In the first place, it gives the student higher literary standards concerning the short story, which is, at present, the most popular form of fiction. It is probably true that college courses and the occasional books and essays that are frequently used in such courses deserve about equal credit for preserving the best traditions of the short-story art. It is through these agencies, at least in part, that the Henry Jameses and the Rudyard Kiplings are remembered as the ever-increasing supply of new stories, many of them of inferior quality, threatens to engulf the old, and that the Ruth Suckows, the Edna Ferbers, and other meritorious writers of today are sifted out from the horde now flooding the market with their wares. The first advantage, then, is that the student becomes a discriminating critic of fiction, learns to enjoy what is good, and gains acquaintance with the exacting requirements of the short-story art. In the second place, the course may stimulate him to make experiments of his own in short-story writing. It may be superfluous to warn him that this course is merely a beginning—that years of study and effort may be the cost of mastery of the short story, that attending a college class two or three times a week for half a college year or even a full college year and writing short stories in compliance with required assignments will not surely make a competent and finished writer of him.

2 IMPORTANCE OF WRITING

The student must write, and write without ceasing. In making this statement, we do not have in mind only specific courses in English composition. We mean also the writing which the student does of his own accord, in season and out of season. We mean the kind of writing which men like Hawthorne and Stevenson imposed upon themselves. They by no means always wrote for publication. Much of what they wrote, especially in their earlier years, was for practice and experimentation.

Too many young writers think that writing is a gift of the gods, that and only that. For geniuses of the first magnitude it is possible that writing may be instinctive and spontaneous, they may write as easily as the birds sing. But for the average mortal, even if he be a man of some talent, good writing is assisted by incessant practice, for writing, like music, is an art. It is said of James Lane Allen, who left college with a determination to write, that for years he was rejected by magazine and book publishers, but that he wrote and rewrote, that he studied the art of fiction as the musician studies the organ. When skilled writers have had such difficulties, the student may hardly expect to turn off a masterpiece in some chance moment of inspiration occasioned perhaps by a cup of tea. On the other hand, it is probably true that any man of intelligence who has a little talent and who is willing to make the necessary sacrifices can gain a tolerable and pleasant livelihood, or even a degree of distinction, by the means of his pen.

3 THE VALUE OF NOTE TAKING

The young literary aspirant should keep a notebook, or, if he wishes to call it so, a scrapbook. If he sees an un-

usual character, he should write him up, although he has as yet no story to put him into. If he learns of an unusual situation, he should write that up, although as yet he has no adequate character to fit it. Likewise, if he becomes acquainted with a suggestive setting, independent as yet of any characters or situation, he should write of that. If ever he feels an inspiration of any kind, he should get it in black and white while the mood is on, even if the result is only a fragment. Much of the painstaking scribbling done in this form will probably be utterly worthless, but as the days pass, he will be learning to write. Moreover, the very act of writing begets material. The average mind, to be set in motion, often has to undergo a process somewhat analogous to the starting of a machine. Many potential good writers accept defeat too soon because they do not understand the extreme difficulty involved in getting under way. One should remember that in experimental writing there may be an occasional passage of real merit, and that the first paragraphs of a literary masterpiece are not always the first to be written in point of time. A passage composed long before the finished masterpiece may be the nucleus from which the whole has sprung.

4 IMPORTANCE OF READING

In addition to writing, the student should read. This reading should extend beyond the prescribed reading incidental to college classes in which he is enrolled. It should include both the well-known discussions and criticisms of the short story and short stories themselves. The student must realize that the short story is a highly artistic type. No writer is born with a knowledge of its technique, nor in the course of a whole life would the most gifted genius be able to attain it independently of others.

William Dean Howells, Henry James, Maupassant, and other most excellent craftsmen zealously studied the successes of their predecessors and contemporaries. The torch is passed on rather than lighted anew each time. The youthful student will find it exceedingly profitable to read with care the short stories of eminent Russian, French, English, and American writers and to study their construction and content. It must be remembered in this connection that, although a single reading may suffice when one is reading for pleasure alone, careful rereading is necessary for a genuine study of the short story. In fact, it is often the second and third perusals that reveal the secrets of craftsmanship, for one of the distinguishing characteristics of the real artist is his ability to conceal his methods.

A wide range of reading affords another advantage. It prevents one from becoming narrow, from thinking that the short story is a machine-made thing, and from becoming dogmatic in his pronouncements about its technique. The careful reader will find that the geniuses do not write slavishly by rule, and this is a wholesome truth to discover. Almost as soon as one decides that he has found a principle universally applicable, he may discover that somebody has violated it with notable success.

5 A READING PROGRAM

It is probably advisable for the student to work out his own program, with guidance, possibly, from textbooks and instructors. There is a certain pleasure to be derived from following one's own choice. Excellent assistance may be obtained from a book like Professor F. L. Pattee's *The Development of the American Short Story*. If the student reads this work carefully, he will find the main text and the exercises bristling with suggestions for additional reading. The suggestions gleaned from such

a book as this—and elsewhere—should appear, as fast as they come, in the form of a proposed reading list in a section of the student's own notebook. In this way one may store up a supply of useful and interesting reading, which never need be exhausted, for the list may frequently be lengthened.

6 IMPORTANCE OF A LIBERAL EDUCATION

Occasionally the student interested in writing makes the serious mistake of growing impatient with other subjects required by the curriculum. He may begrudge the time which he is required to give to sociology, or economics, or biology, or psychology, or philosophy, or something else. As a matter of fact, any one of these subjects may prove invaluable to him. There is now a particularly active quest among thinking men to find what manner of life we are living on this planet. Each one of us flashes into consciousness at birth and out again at death. The moment of our dwelling here, none the less, seems of tremendous importance. It is filled with days of dull routine, with tumultuous joys and sorrows, with gleams of ugliness and beauty. Out there in the world we see our fellows striving as if the very universe depended upon their efforts. What is it all about, anyway? There is a mystery and a poetry in life which the really successful writer of the short story must feel and be able to express.

Now it so happens that the acquiring of this sense of the world spirit and mystery is not at all a poetic thing at every stage. The acquisition may come only after tedious days in the laboratory dissecting fishworms or breathing the fumes of chlorine gas, or after laborious hours spent in trying to fathom Bergson's philosophy, or in attempts, perhaps vain, to visualize the constitution of the atom, or in alarm over the Malthusian law, or in perplexity over

the theories of Karl Marx After four years of this are over, if the student has been somewhat serious about it, he will probably fare forth into life with a sense of wonderment, which will occasionally burn with some unexpectedness and brightness when he comes into contact with certain human experiences In accordance with the powers of his intellect and emotions, he will be stirred more or less than his fellow mortals The philosophy of his life, which has formed, or is forming, or is continually changing, will determine his moods and his outlook, varying perhaps at different times These moods and this outlook will be charged with more or less poetry and philosophy, and when he comes to write a story, the materials will be dominated by the emotion that prevails at the time, or that is evoked by the material itself The individual occurrence of which he writes may suggest large, elemental, universal things

This suggestiveness, however, is a delicate matter There is a type of ultra-serious youth, who, whenever he attempts to write a short story, feels that he must deliver some deep message about life His instructor commonly speaks of him as having "soul struggles" Soul struggles are to be strictly avoided The writer should tell a clean-cut story of life That is his chief concern The philosophy of the thing should appear between the lines, in the deft handling of the plot, and in the solution, there should be no need of comment on the part of the author It should control his mood, which in turn should control his selection and his handling of the material Just as actual events may suggest deeper significances without having those significances labeled upon them, so the short story should suggest them without labels

7 IMPORTANCE OF THE COMMON TOUCH

In the foregoing paragraphs we have advocated an academic training for the writer. And an examination of the lives of successful short story writers of the past and of the present will show that, with a few notable exceptions, which have been made much of by the detractors of college training, by far the greater number of writers have had important academic contacts or have had a private education equivalent in cultural value. There is, however, a danger inherent in college life—so far as the creative writer is concerned. The danger is that one will lose contact with the common mass of humanity and go through life with the ideals of the limited few, ideals which will be an impassable barrier between him and the millions who constitute the greater part of the human race. A man who acquires academic honors and degrees runs a distinct risk of rendering himself forever unfitted to write short stories with an appeal to any beyond his own restricted group. Many a man has lost his freshness in point of view during a strenuous college course, and has subsequently regretted the loss.

The characters of the world's best short stories are common people—farmers, laborers, factory girls, illiterate foreigners, soldiers, sailors, doctors, preachers, lawyers, and business men—all struggling to gain their livelihoods, or to improve their social positions, or to make their lives richer and happier. People such as these constitute the mass of American citizens and present many of the crucial problems of the nation. With them much of the serious fiction of the present is dealing and probably will deal in the future. The writer must understand them to write of them or for them. This is not to imply, of course, that the rich, the fashionable, and the ultra-intellectual have

no place in good fiction. Some of the short stories of Edith Wharton and of Katharine Fullerton Gerould are sufficient evidence to the contrary. Literature has no favorites among the high or low. The short story, however, in its brief history, has been more devoted to the commonplace majority than to the select few.

8 IMPORTANCE OF WRITING IN YOUTH

Another important point for the student to remember is that youth is the time for beginning to write. Writing is not, in general, a thing to be deferred until one reaches middle age, or even until one reaches the thirties. Many college students are inclined to feel that the years of effort and accomplishment in all kinds of endeavor are far in the future. There may be truth in this view for future physicians, or lawyers, or engineers, but it is not a good view for writers. Stephen Crane died when he was twenty-nine. Mary E. Wilkins-Freeman had received definite recognition for her literary achievements when she was only twenty-five. Men and women who have been known to magazine readers for years are even yet only in their thirties. The world's literature, past and present, is filled with the amazing achievements of the very young. Occasionally a writer will begin to write late in life, but the instances are comparatively rare. More than this, the creative powers of some writers seem to decline before they reach middle age. The very first successes are frequently the best known or the finest work that an author does.

9 FUTURE OF THE SHORT STORY

Present conditions indicate a continued popularity for the short story. It is the type of fiction peculiarly adapted to the modern magazine and to the impetuous haste of

modern times The fashions in the short story as regards both content and form may change, but the type seems almost sure to persist The field is a tempting one for a young man or a young woman with literary ambitions First, of course, there is an opportunity for commercial success But more important than this, from the standpoint of art, there will be an opportunity to interpret life in the interesting years that lie just ahead—the years when the interior and the western part of America will be transformed from a frontier to a center of culture, when our alarming social and religious problems will be approaching nearer to a solution, when the masses will awaken more and more to their privileges and opportunities in a land of vast resources, and when our provincial nationalism will broaden into a world consciousness Such changes will produce intense struggles where sorrows will alternate with joys, and gloom will alternate with hope The short story will afford an artistic and powerful means for interpreting aspects of these momentous events

EXERCISES

(These exercises are intended to assist the student in voluntary enterprises They are intended only to suggest something of the direction his original experiments should take)

1 Buy a durable notebook and begin without delay to use it We shall not venture to suggest the kind of notebook, as that will depend upon the habits, the sex, and the occupation of the student A small notebook which one can carry with him and use on the spot, if the occasion is suitable, is often useful On the other hand, a larger notebook is best when one wishes to record his observations and reflections with deliberation in the quiet of his room Make a study of Hawthorne's *The American Notebooks*, not necessarily as a model but rather as a means of obtaining suggestions

2 Start in your notebook a bibliography of the short story,

selected in accordance with your own desires. F. L. Pattee's *The Development of the American Short Story* has already been mentioned as a valuable starting point for the formulating of such a bibliography. There are other and shorter discussions of the short story proportionately as good for the same purpose. Read carefully and thoughtfully H. S. Canby's introduction to *A Study of the Short Story*, or Stuart P. Sherman's introduction to *A Book of Short Stories*, or Chapter XII of Bliss Perry's *Prose Fiction*, or Charles S. Baldwin's introduction to *American Short Stories*, or Chapters X and XI of Clayton Hamilton's *A Manual of the Art of Fiction*.

3 Formulate a highly selective list of short story collections and of books about the short story to buy for yourself. A personally owned book has more charm and more value than a library book. Furthermore, if one owns the book himself, he can use the margins for jotting down notes and for preserving ideas inspired by the reading.

4 Subscribe to a purely literary magazine such as *The Saturday Review of Literature*. The reviews and advertisements of books in such a periodical are invaluable. For instance, the William J. Black Company of New York advertises in periodicals of this kind a complete collection of Maupassant's stories, a collection which might prove highly stimulating to one who aspires to write short stories. Maupassant has long been a source of inspiration to short story writers just as Spenser has been a source of inspiration to poets.

5 Use your notebook for such purposes as the following

- a Suppose your emotions are profoundly stirred by the music of an orchestra or by a theatrical performance. Your mind is filled with artistic impulses and high resolves. William James warns us that it is dangerous to let such promptings be dissipated in thin air. Such moods are precious. If you can successfully transfer them to others in writing, your success is assured. Record them in black and white before they are forgotten.

- b* Write descriptions of interesting strangers whom you see on trains, in restaurants, and in other places
- c* Write character sketches of puzzling personalities with whom you come into contact
- d* Preserve interesting fragments of dialogue in which you take part or which you overhear
- e* Jot down possible suggestions for plots of short stories
- f* Record your vagrant reveries about human nature, life, and the universe Do not let them escape, as they are prone to do
- g* Whenever your emotions are stirred by public events or dramatic occurrences of any kind, write about them while the mood is on, before you lapse back into the daily routine

Sources of Short-Story Material

1 EVOLUTION OF THE SHORT STORY IN RELATION TO MATERIALS¹

☞§ THE SHORT STORY, NOW become one of the most prominent of literary types, has gained its vogue only during the last century, for, prior to the appearance of Irving's *Sketch Book*, there existed no literary form closely comparable to our modern short story. True, all the ancient literatures which have come down to us afford specimens of short prose narratives, the Renaissance gives us such outstanding examples as Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Bandello's *Novelle*, *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, and the tales of Rabelais, and the eighteenth century affords brief narratives by Defoe, Voltaire, Doctor Johnson, and others. But even a superficial comparison of a hundred recent magazine stories with anything written prior to 1800, will show that the modern short story is a distinct and separate form, related only remotely to any of its predecessors.

¹For an exhaustive study of the history of the short story, see Professor F. L. Pattee's *The Development of the American Short Story*.

The periodicals—

One of the chief causes of the development of the short story as a literary type is the modern magazine. Obviously the short story is admirably adapted to the needs of the modern weekly and monthly periodicals, where in a single issue several brief but complete narratives may be interspersed among articles and essays. Periodical publications first gained prominence in England during the early years of the eighteenth century in the famous *Tatler* and *Spectator* of Addison and Steele. The immediate result in England was the emergence of the familiar essay, which, as written by Addison and Steele, often contained narratives. The narrative that might be embodied in an essay, however, was only secondary to an expository purpose, its real object was to illustrate in pleasant wise a truth or a principle announced at the beginning or stated at the end. In England the slender issues of these early periodicals evolved into daily newspapers and bulky magazines containing long articles on public events, or formal and familiar essays, or novels appearing in serial form.

Transition from essay to short story—

The short story, however, did not arise in England, but in America. Washington Irving took the first long step toward the short story somewhat over a century after the appearance of the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*. At the outset of his literary career he was thoroughly under the influence of Addison. It requires no very penetrating critic to observe the similarity between Addison's essays in the *Spectator* and Irving's sketches in the *Sketch Book* (1819–20). There is, however, one vital difference. Some of Irving's narratives, like *Rip Van Winkle* and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, are written solely for entertainment,

they have not that primary expository purpose which characterized the essays of Addison. Irving popularized short fiction for the sake of the fiction itself, and this was an important advance. But Irving stopped far short of achieving the modern short story. The essay spirit still lingers strongly even in his most important narratives, as, indeed, it does in the short stories of Hawthorne written a little later. Irving is leisurely, his tales lack the movement of the modern short story. In *Rip Van Winkle*, for example, he consumes fully one-third of his space before the action gets under way. The technique of the modern short story was yet to be developed.

Progress toward unity of situation and effect—

The next important writers of the short story were Hawthorne and Poe. Irving, as we have seen, tended to popularize the short story. Hawthorne, writing in the new form in the two decades between 1830 and 1850, tended to stabilize it and to give it weight by his deep moral earnestness. He also emphasized in his short fiction a single climactic situation instead of a series of happenings—a decidedly important advance from the standpoint of short-story technique. He was, however, by no means modern in his artistry, his compliance with modern requirements in the relatively few instances where he conforms to them seems the result of accident rather than of conscious effort. It was for Poe to discover that the short story was a new literary type with laws of construction peculiar to itself, and to announce in 1842, when he reviewed Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales*, that its object was to accomplish a single effect. Strangely enough, Poe's contemporaries did not appreciate the brilliance of his achievements and he was not immediately influential in America. In fact, Poe's pronouncements were first appre-

ciated by Frenchmen, and his influence reached a later generation of Americans only indirectly through France. According to Professor Pattee the American literary world was not fully conscious until the 1880's that a new literary form had been evolved.

Romance prevalent in early short stories—

The short stories of Irving, Hawthorne, and Poe are profoundly romantic in spirit. Although Irving and Hawthorne may lay their scenes in New York or in New England, although there may flash across their pages an occasional realistic figure like Dominicus Pike of *Mr Higginbotham's Catastrophe*, yet they make no deliberate attempt in any large way to depict the people of these sections of the nation as they really are in everyday life, and to concern themselves realistically with human experiences. To take but two examples, we may mention Hawthorne's *Dr Heidegger's Experiment*, in which a group of old people regain their youth by drinking magic water, and Irving's *Rip Van Winkle*, in which, as every schoolboy knows, a quaint villager awakens after a slumber of twenty years. Poe's contribution to a knowledge of American manners and customs during the first half of the nineteenth century is even less, and his pages are replete with happenings such as we never shall encounter either in real life or in any representative modern short story. What with his tapestry horses which suddenly come to life, and his bloody ladies who walk forth from their coffins, it may fairly be said that he does not aim to convince any more than he aims to localize; rather, he strives to grip, to fascinate, to horrify. With Poe, however, the age of romanticism waned and the next important step in the development of the short story was to be in the direction of realism.

Transition from romance to realism—

In 1870 Bret Harte startled the literary world by such short stories as *The Luck of Roaring Camp* and *The Outcasts of Poker Flat*. These were local color stories, commonly supposed, when they first appeared, to be realistic pictures of life in the California gold fields. As a matter of fact, they were only superficially realistic. Harte's inordinate fondness for depicting desperadoes and prostitutes as people with hearts of gold is actually a kind of romanticism. But at first his stories passed for realism and set the fashion. Foremost among those influenced by Bret Harte was Rudyard Kipling, who wrote local color stories of India which passed at the time for realism but which were really romantic, as in his portrayal of the British soldier. Prominent among this local color school in America beginning to attract attention in the 1870's are George Washington Cable, who wrote brilliantly but romantically of life in New Orleans, and Sarah Orne Jewett, who in writing of New England told only of the good and left out the bad.

The next step was to a genuine realism, a realism which attempted to paint life as it really is lived, not by idealized characters in out-of-the-way places but by ordinary people in the well-known centers of population. The prime object of the writers of this school was to reveal the exact truth about those sections of America of which they wrote. The movement manifested itself in the 1890's. James Lane Allen, interesting himself in Kentucky, his native state, deliberately avoided a sentimental portrayal of his characters and sought to get at the fundamental truths of their inner lives. Hamlin Garland tried to show the unpleasant side of farm life in the Middle West of the day.

when he wrote Grace Elizabeth King, a native of New Orleans, believing that Cable had misrepresented the people of her state, attempted to reveal the actual conditions Mary E Wilkins-Freeman, in contrast to Sarah Orne Jewett, sought to show a New England without glamour—the real New England, pleasant or unpleasant. Everywhere in the writings of the authors of this school we find settings, atmosphere, and characters which are American to the core.

Humor in the short story—

The prevailing realism of recent decades, it should be noted, has been relieved by a native American humor. Of the older writers—Irving, Hawthorne, and Poe—Irving alone was humorous, and his humor has a quaint Old-World, eighteenth century flavor. But in later decades a robust humor, indigenous to our soil and quite different from the delicate, Old World humor of Irving, has made its way into our literature. It is humor of a broad type, consistent with the rough conditions in a young and undeveloped country, and necessary as a kind of protection when life might otherwise seem dark and almost unendurable. Enter almost any small American village, no matter how unpretentious and unattractive, and you will find, when you come really to know the people, that the village wits have a droll way of looking at life and a manner of expressing themselves which is genuinely funny. The American soldiers in the World War gained a reputation for a vivacious, though somewhat broad, type of humor which was generally recognized as having a peculiarly American flavor. The greatest exponent of this native American humor is, of course, Mark Twain, who is not primarily a short-story writer, but who has contributed at least one famous example in the short-story form, namely,

The Jumping Frog of Calaveras County Such writers as Frank R. Stockton, O. Henry, Ivin Cobb, and Ring Lardner are abundant evidence of the leaven of humor in modern American short fiction

Probable continuance of realism in the immediate future—

What are the present tendencies? It is difficult to tell. The short story as a type has proceeded steadily from romanticism to realism, and has finally concerned itself with the vital conflicts of actual human experience. Is there anything on the horizon which would signify a deflection of the current in a contrary direction? We see no such indications. Everywhere we find an insistence on facing actuality. First of all, modern science has attained its great achievements by a bold search for truth, be that what it may be. Second, the two World Wars and the eclipse of European democracy have emphasized the many glaring failures of modern civilization. The very salvation of mankind would seem to depend on an accurate determination of what men and conditions really are. When the temper of the age is realistic, literature is likely to be realistic too. Probably, therefore, the immediate future of the short story will be in the direction of a deeper realism than even that of the recent past.

EXERCISES

1. Make a study of some of the sketches in Irving's *Sketch Book* and compare them with an equal number of the essays of Addison in the *Tatler* and *Spectator*.

2. Read Hawthorne's *Rappaccini's Daughter*, *The Birthmark*, *The Great Stone Face*, *The Wives of the Dead*, *The Great Carbuncle*, *The White Old Maid*, *The Minister's Black Veil*, *Ethan Brand*, *The Snow Image*, *The Ambitious Guest*, *Mr Higginbotham's Catastrophe*, *Dr Heidegger's Experiment*, *Lady Eleanor's Mantle*, *Wakefield*, and others. To what ex-

tent do these stories have unity of situation? To what extent are they romantic? In what respects are they true to life? Do you find examples of the familiar essay style?

3 Read Poe's *MS Found in a Bottle*, *The Assignment*, *Ligeia*, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, *The Masque of the Red Death*, *The Mystery of Marie Roget*, *The Pit and the Pendulum*, *The Tell Tale Heart*, *The Gold Bug*, *The Black Cat*, *The Purloined Letter*, *The Cask of Amontillado*, *The Domain of Aynheim*, *Landor's Cottage*, and others. To what extent do these tales have unity of situation and unity of effect? To what extent are they romantic? In what magazines would such stories find acceptance today?

4 Read *The Luck of Roaring Camp*, *The Outcasts of Poker Flat*, *Tennessee's Partner*, *M'liss*, *An Ingenue of the Sierras*, and other stories of Bret Harte. How do these stories differ from those of Poe and Hawthorne? How true are they to life?

5 For truth to life compare with the stories of Bret Harte those of Hamlin Garland in *Main Travelled Roads* and *Piano Folks*.

6 Compare Sarah Orne Jewett's *Miss Tempy's Watchers*, *The Dulham Ladies*, *An Only Son*, *Marsh Rosemary*, *A White Heron*, *Law Lane*, *A Lost Lover*, *The Courting of Sister Wisby*, *A Winter Courtship*, *Miss Esther's Guest*, and *Fame's Little Day* with some of the stories of Mary E. Wilkins Freeman in *A Humble Remonstrance and Other Stories* and *A New England Nun and Other Stories*. What is the essential difference in the realism of these two writers of New England life?

7 Read short stories of contemporary realists, such as Theodore Dreiser, Mary Ellen Chase, Erskine Caldwell, Willa Cather, Irvin S. Cobb, Edna Ferber, Katharine Fullerton Gould, Fannie Hurst, and Katharine Brush. Characteristic stories of these writers may be found in *Contemporary Short Stories*, edited by Professor K. A. Robinson, or in other similar collections. Read also the *O. Henry Memorial Prize Stories*,

edited by Blanche Colton Williams Compare these with the early stories of Irving, Hawthorne, and Poe What changes in subject matter and in purpose do you observe?

8 Read at least half a dozen of the tales in Boccaccio's *Decameron* In what respects do they differ from the modern short story?

9 Make a study of the short stories in the old numbers of the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper's*, and *Scribner's* Observe especially the changes of fashion in the short story from decade to decade Begin with the earliest issues of these magazines

2 WHERE TO FIND MATERIAL

A young writer, fired with the commendable ambition to build up pictures of life in fiction, frequently falls down at the very threshold of his effort He does not know what to write his short story about It would, of course, be futile to supply him with a list of plots which would last him for an indefinite period In fact, as we shall see, the success of the writer of fiction depends in a large measure upon his own quickness to recognize available material in the busy life about him and to catch hold of it before it departs from his memory The best procedure is to point out to the student some of the cardinal principles upon which the selection of material depends

Good material available in familiar situations—

Just as it is well for the descriptive writer to find his material in the life with which he is thoroughly familiar, so it is well for the writer of the short story, for precisely the same reasons, to confine himself to the same bounds Many a young writer has flown off on the wings of the morning to the opium dens of the Orient, or to the front-line trenches in the Argonne, or to the castle of an English earl, or to the luxurious estate of an American millionaire,

and has attempted to find in surroundings entirely unfamiliar to him a worthy subject for his pen. One who has passed his life in a relatively restricted section of the country and who has lived the existence of the average youth will do well to place his fiction in his old familiar haunts until he has travelled farther and longer. He will do well to content himself with his college, or the village of his boyhood, or the mining town where he once lived, or the industrial center where he has worked, and to weave into his fiction not only familiar places but familiar characters and events. Nor need the writer feel cramped in what he may regard as his narrow confines. He should know, as we shall next attempt to explain, that wherever human emotions arise from the vicissitudes of life, wherever human mirth, joys, and sorrows are found, he will have befitting themes.

The beginner is prone to search for too complicated a situation for his story. Although it is certainly true that some situations are better than others, yet the beginner must not be too fastidious. If he waits for the ideal situation, he may wait in vain. Furthermore, the beginner may not realize from what morsels it is possible for good short stories to grow. The finished masterpiece of the expert may come from a very unpromising suggestion, a suggestion the possibilities of which an amateur might never see. Such suggestions are to be found about us everywhere—in the newspapers, in our own lives, in the lives of our friends, in the odd experiences which we hear recounted in conversations. In the words of Professor F. L. Pattee, the short story is a “vividly presented moment of today.” This felicitous phrase suggests at once the singleness of situation, the intensity, and the realism of the modern short story. As we have seen in our study of the history of this literary type, decades passed before these

three principles were evolved. The student will save himself time and effort if he grasps their truth at the outset.

The value of the commonplace—

Let us consider the basic situations in certain successful short stories. It will be observed that they contain no particularly novel or extraordinary aspects, that they could be paralleled in almost any community, and that they are centered in limited events. In Octave Thanet's *The Plumb Idiot*, a change in the administration at Washington upsets a southwestern rural community by causing the dismissal of a well-beloved and public-spirited postmaster to make room for a drunken scamp. In Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's *A Village Singer*, an old woman whose failing voice has caused her dismissal from the village choir shows her resentment by singing so loudly as to drown the voice of the young woman chosen as her successor. In Alice Brown's *A Last Assembling*, a rural spinster who is forced to choose between her humble ancestral home and a prosperous city lover, chooses the former. In Helen R. Martin's *The Conversion of Elviny*, a farmer boy tries to secure from his fiancée a promise that she will not become a member of a certain religious denomination to which she has a leaning and which demands that she wear a peculiar kind of bonnet and dress. In George Ade's *Effie Whittlesy*, a husband and wife who have prospered in the city hire a maid. The husband, after she arrives, recognizes her to be an old friend of his boyhood, whom he has known in the country. In Fannie Hurst's *Humoresque*, a humble Russian Jew by the assistance of his mother becomes a great violinist. In June, 1917, he gives up his career at least temporarily to enter the military service. He leaves New York for the battlefields in France. In Willa Cather's *Paul's Case*, a high school boy

of a neurotic temperament feels the lure of the stage and of fashionable hotels. He fraudulently obtains money from a bank, goes to New York City, lives the life he craves for a few days until his money gives out, and then kills himself. In Irvin Cobb's *The Smart Aleck*, a man renowned for his wit in his native village goes to a carnival in a neighboring city. There it is obvious to everyone that he is a greenhorn from the country. All his vaunted wit goes for naught, and he suffers humiliating experiences. In Theodore Dreiser's *The Second Choice*, a working girl, who is engaged to be married to a steady-going but prosaic young man of her own limited set, has a thrilling romance with a dashing and colorful lover from the outside world. When he deserts her, she returns reluctantly to her old lover. In Edgar Valentine Smith's *The Prelude*, a girl from an illiterate poor-white family in the South voluntarily enters a girl's reformatory with the hope of improving herself. In Amy Wentworth Stone's *Possessing Prudence*, a little girl who dislikes her name, Prudence Jane, tells the new minister that it is Imogen Rose. In Hamlin Garland's *Among the Corn-Rows*, a girl who is compelled by her father to do heavy farm work escapes from her hard lot by eloping with a young man of the community. In Katherine Mansfield's *The Fly*, a man observes a fly attempting to escape from under the weight of ink which has fallen upon it. His own struggles in life seem to be symbolized by the frantic efforts of the fly, which he observes with the greatest suspense.

The number of stories of this kind could easily be multiplied many-fold. Moreover, each one of these stories has been selected by expert critics as a story of particular distinction. Most of them have found their way into short-story collections as models of the art. It would be interesting to learn just what was the original idea which

prompted the author in each case to write his story, to learn just where and how he found the germ of his plot. The opinion may be hazarded that the original suggestion was little more than the bald, perhaps somewhat tame, situation which appears above. As a matter of fact, it is probably true that an experienced writer, really interested in life and in his art, has more material at his disposal than he can work up in a lifetime. His difficulty is not so much to find situations as to give artistic form to those which he has already found. At any rate, it is obvious from the foregoing illustrations that a writer with an alert mind and a sympathetic soul may find material at his very doors.

Materials supplied by emotional crises—

Still further assistance in the selection of a subject may be found in the consideration of the purpose of the short story. This purpose is to appeal to the emotions. One reads a short story not primarily to be informed. If the reader wishes to be informed, he goes to the encyclopedia, to an article in a magazine, or to some other source of knowledge. On the other hand, he reads a short story for the pleasurable effect which comes when his feelings are aroused from a state of apathy or passiveness, for the delight arising from the pleasurable excitation of his emotions. A man goes through the routine duties of his everyday life engrossed in his study or in his business. He may, it is true, be passing through a crisis in his own life, but that crisis develops slowly, so slowly perhaps that he is only vaguely conscious of it, or is ignorant of it altogether. He experiences from it, perhaps for days at a time, no particular joy or sorrow. The hours pass on in their wonted way, although he may be continually haunted by a more or less dim consciousness of a stir in the lower currents of his own experience or universal human expe-

rience But in a skilful short story the events are concentrated In fifteen minutes or half an hour the reader participates vicariously in emotions which in real life might be extended over months and which awaken slumbering emotions of his own soul

The situation is comparable to the effect of music on the listener We hear, let us say, the vigorous strains of some famous march It stirs us Why? Because, for one thing, it seems to symbolize the onward march of human events We feel, for the time being, that men and the world are moving gloriously forward, and we exult accordingly, as the triumphant tones fall upon our ears Yet a few hours later, when we have left the music hall, the world seems a very still and ordinary place Humanity, which so short a time before, under the influence of the music, appeared to be valiantly pressing onward, now may seem even dull and motiveless, and we exult no longer Likewise, a good story accelerates the normal currents of human emotions, and may bring forth into the light of day states and conditions which are truer than ordinary life would seem to indicate Through the famous short stories of the world we can participate, on occasions which might otherwise be dull and meaningless, in times of great excitement, we can pass through great or unusual moments, we can share the emotional upheavals of those who have experienced triumphs and sorrows Through the examples afforded in the stories we can come into contact with the deep national, racial, and social movements of our time

The bearing of all this on the selection of material is obvious The writer does not necessarily go about looking for complicated plots and for external situations, although, of course, he will have a use for these On the other hand, he will often find it worth his while to look for emotions

The germ of many a short story is in an emotion rather than in an outward physical state, and the author's work is to transfer to the reader an emotion which may have been suggested by actual conditions. Most of the situations mentioned a few paragraphs above as illustrations of short-story material are valuable largely because of the emotions underlying them. And, to repeat, it is a rare community which does not afford similar examples of those who have suffered or triumphed from life's experiences. From these the author will choose with discrimination. He will alter and condense the circumstances so as to heighten the effect. He will bring together events which in real life were far apart or which did not occur at all. Subtly, delicately, and imaginatively, yet truly, he will transmute into literature the disorganized and lusterless material with which he started.

Availability of one's own experiences as material—

We have now seen that the amateur, if he is wise, will keep within the boundaries of his own experience. We have also seen that the short story must excite pleasurable emotions. These two facts point to a third fact, namely, that the writer may come very near home indeed for his material, that he may draw upon his own emotional experiences for coloring his fiction and giving it truth. From time immemorial, writers of great distinction have appeared in their literary products. It is probably true, if we may believe the modern psychologists, that they cannot help so appearing, that even the most objective writers in one way or another get into their own poetry, or drama, or novels, or short stories. It would be interesting to know just how much of Shakespeare there is in Hamlet, to know how much Keats is to be identified with Porphyro in *The Eve of Saint Agnes*, to know how much of Hawthorne

there is in the hero of *The Ambitious Guest* This identification, or partial identification, of writer and character is sometimes unconscious, sometimes conscious It is certainly conscious in such novels as *David Copperfield*, *Pendennis*, and *The Mill on the Floss*, where Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot, respectively, identify themselves with their main characters And it is certainly conscious in much contemporary literature where the autobiographical element sometimes becomes almost an obsession The beginner, therefore, has the sanction of an adequate literary precedent if he enters his own story and if he plays there as considerable a part as he did in the fanciful daydreams of his childhood

There are two chief sources of material within oneself One can throw the light of the imagination upon one's own past experiences as did Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot in the novels we have just mentioned Or he can use imaginatively not what he has done but what he would like to do, can give expression to his own wishes and ambitions, and can make his characters undergo experiences through which he would like to pass, or through which he would fear to pass The danger, however, is that the writer, when he disguises himself in one of his characters, will not be absolutely truthful and frank, that he will keep from the light of day the more intimate and human parts of his experiences He may not realize that the things he will hesitate to tell are the very things that the reader may enjoy, that may be true to universal human experience If he is reticent about self-revelation, he should remember not only that disguises are permissible, but that they are desirable It is certainly not required of him that he offend the canons of good taste Moreover, the reader may never know that the fiction is partly autobiographical, or at least he may be very uncertain of the extent to

which it is so. The very enigma presented to him may add to his interest and suspense. The world will never know the full extent to which imaginative literature of the past and of the present is autobiographic. It is probably far more profoundly so than anyone will ever be able to prove.

3 STORY WRITING A SYNTHETIC PROCESS

The four chief objectives of the short story—

It is customary to divide short stories into four kinds according to whether the chief concern is with character, or with situation, or with setting, or with theme. Such a classification is useful and convenient, although it is occasionally somewhat hard to determine into what category a given story falls. Thus one writer on the subject of narrative technique recently declared that *The Necklace* by Maupassant is a great character story, while another writer insisted that it is essentially a story of situation. Two recent writers disagree in the same way about the classification of *The Belled Buzzard* by Irvin Cobb. Such a division of opinion is due to the fact that most stories, of necessity, involve a blending of character, situation, setting, and theme, and that it is often difficult to weigh to a nicety each element of the story.

Thus, how should Hawthorne's *The Ambitious Guest* be classified? The character of the ambitious young hero is decidedly one of the central interests of the story, to the extent even that Hawthorne states the dominant trait of the character in the title. The reader is made to feel a genuine sympathy for the high-spirited and wholesome young man. Next, the situation is of importance. The dramatic annihilation of the inn by the landslide will be remembered by the reader as long as the story is remembered. Furthermore, the setting is memorable because of

Hawthorne's delicate and artistic handling of it. It also supplies the obstacle, the characters have for their foemen not other men, but something far more formidable—the forces of nature. Finally, the theme is important, perhaps most important of all. Hawthorne would show by the story the transitory nature of human ambition in a dark and uncertain world.

In any story there is likely to be an admixture of character, situation, setting, and theme, just as surely as a narrative involves putting human beings into a crisis at a given time and place and just as surely as it is natural to philosophize over the outcome. In some stories one element will predominate beyond question. In others two or more of the elements will be about equally balanced. The decision whether the story is a character story or something else may vary with the reader. If the reader is interested primarily in human behavior, his attention will always be centered on the character. If another reader is interested primarily in action, he will concern himself most of all with that, and may call the story a story of situation. If still a third reader is wont to speculate on universal human truths as he sees these truths illustrated in human conduct, he will be disposed to find in the short story what has been termed a theme. In brief, the reader is likely to see what interests him most in fiction, just as the observer is likely to see what interests him most in life.

Assembling materials—

At present, however, we are interested not so much in distinguishing one kind of story from another as in seeing that the material consists of these four elements which we have just been discussing. The student, also, should realize that story writing is often a synthetic process. It is exceedingly rare that a short story is found ready made

in real life, as if waiting only for someone to write it down. Quite to the contrary, the process usually involves getting a little here, a little there, and a little somewhere else, and then imaginatively blending the parts into a harmonious whole. Often the original suggestion for the narrative comes from an isolated bit of material. We find in real life an extraordinary or a significant character, but he is going about his daily tasks in the even tenor of his way. He is passing through no crisis which we can observe. Therefore, if we put him in a short story, we must provide him with something to do which will put him to the test. Or we may come into contact with a splendid situation for which we have no character. Or we may have an ideal setting, for which we must provide both characters and situation. Or we may have only a theme which we wish to make concrete by an illustration from life, and for which we must provide an appropriate event, appropriate characters, and an appropriate setting.

For example, let us turn again to *The Ambitious Guest*. Today, if you visit Crawford Notch in the White Mountains, you will be told all of the incidents which befell the innkeeper and his family upon the memorable occasion of the mountain slide, a pamphlet will be given you concerning it. But you will hear nothing of the ambitious guest. Hawthorne, whose imagination was evidently fired at the suddenness of the catastrophe, supplied the young man to illustrate the tragic futility of the desire for earthly fame. As we have said before, this character may be a partial projection of Hawthorne himself. He, only thirty-one years old when he wrote the story, and ambitious for a literary success which he had not yet achieved, may well have imagined himself to have shared the lot of the unfortunate mountain family.

Irvin Cobb's well known story, *The Belled Buzzard*,

affords an example of the method by which the parts of a story are sometimes assembled Cobb, so we are told by Professor Uzzell,² saw a flock of buzzards feeding on a dead shark in the mouth of the Savannah River This, and nothing more than this, was the beginning of his now famous story These buzzards reminded him of a buzzard reputed to fly about over some of the Southern states with a bell attached to its neck At this point Cobb takes refuge in the imagination For the dead shark he substitutes a murdered man, and has the crime detected by the presence of a belled buzzard hovering over the spot where the dead body lies The next step is to create a murderer Where Cobb got Squire H B Gathers we do not know The chances are, however, that he had seen a man at one time or another very much like the squire, or that he compounded him from several men whom he had actually seen or known For his setting he naturally uses the actual Georgia landscape

It would be interesting to know the origin of other famous stories For example, did Mary E Wilkins Freeman in writing *The Revolt of Mother* know of an actual instance of a woman's moving out of a house into a barn? Or was the moving into the barn a product of her imagination, a happy solution of a story which she had in mind to write concerning the privations to which selfish New England farmers had been known to subject their wives in their inordinate desire to improve their farms At any rate, this illustration, and the others, will serve to show that if the student is awake and is interested in life and will allow his imagination to play over the world about him, he need have no difficulty in finding material for his fiction

² *Narrative Technique*, p 292

EXERCISES

(Several hours of concentrated effort should be spent in collecting the material called for in 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 Explore the storehouses of your memory and your experience)

1 Make a list of at least ten suggestions for possible short stories from your own experiences

2 Make a list of at least ten suggestions for short stories based upon happenings in your community

3 Make a list of ten characters within the range of your own experience who might be suitable for a short story Do not pass by persons whom you know best You can give them fictitious names

4 Make a list of at least ten settings which might do for future short stories

5 Make a list of emotional crises experienced by yourself or others whom you know well These crises may concern broken or satisfied friendships, successful or unsuccessful affairs of the heart, the relations of parents to children, business ambitions, the desire for education, social position, fame, power, wealth, and honor, and tragedies, like disease and death, etc

6 Make a list of at least ten of your favorite theories, opinions, or reflections about life, human nature, or the universe at large Consider the advisability of writing short stories to illustrate these themes

FIRST SHORT-STORY ASSIGNMENT

From all the suggestions obtained by the endeavors explained above, select the material for one short story, reserving other possible good material for later use

Make this the material for the story to be worked up in connection with this course Unless your instructor has other plans, write it up now to the best of your ability (before you have studied the next three chapters) Within reasonable limits, take as much time as you need, possibly two weeks more

or less. The instructor will probably appoint a time at which all the short stories of the class are to be finished.

After you have written your short story, and have studied the next three chapters, you will be asked to rewrite it. One good short story will probably be enough for a beginner within the space of a few months. Remember that writing and re-writing have been the procedure of many of the greatest writers.

The Technique of the Short Story

☞ AFTER ONE HAS DECIDED in a general way what his material for a short story will be, how does he go about getting that material into shape? The present chapter will attempt to explain some of the steps which should be taken

1 LIMITATION

Unity of situation—

One of the fundamental principles in the art of the modern short story is economy in the time, in the place, and in the characters. The writer must narrow down the time of the action by beginning as close to the crisis as he can, must confine the action to a single place as nearly as it is possible for him to do so, and must limit the number of main characters to one or two. An ideal condition is for a few characters to be precipitated into an action which lasts for an hour or so and which occurs in a single spot—as in Arnold Bennett's story, *The Idiot*

Although there are, of necessity, numerous exceptions to this rigorous limitation, the critics are agreed that the short story in its most artistic form is best adapted to single situations. In actual practice, some latitude of judgment is permissible as to how utterly single the situation must be, and as to how large the action may be before it has passed beyond the scope of the short story. The general principle, however, is universally accepted.

The reason for this rigid limitation is that adequate opportunity must be given for developing the narrative, and concentration upon details is necessary for this end. Very little material must be selected, elaborated upon, and made vivid. In fact, one of the very first principles for the narrative writer to grasp is that he should be concerned with moments rather than with years, that he should learn to sketch the events of a year in a brief paragraph, and to devote several pages to what happened in five minutes. Thus it is that the short story, with only a few thousand words at its disposal, cannot afford to concern itself with a many-sided situation. Let us examine two passages in which the authors have concentrated upon a few fleeting seconds.

A TRAGIC DISCOVERY

(Mrs Fleming has just discovered evidence which proves that her husband, hitherto considered as a paragon of honesty by her, has defrauded a client of \$3000.)

Suddenly it seemed to this poor woman, sitting on the floor in the dark corner of the library, her fingers dusty, her whole slender body tingling with fatigue—it seemed as if something fell, shuddering, down and down, and down in her breast. Strangely enough, this physical recognition informed her soul. She heard herself speak, as one falling into the unconsciousness of an anesthetic, hears, with a vague astonishment, words

faltering unbidden from the lips "No No No," came the body's frightened denial

Then, in silence, the soul "He—did it He did it "

It was characteristic of Amy that she sought no loophole of escape It never occurred to her that there could be an explanation There were the figures, and the figures meant the facts "*A certain man named Ananias*" (so, suddenly, the words ran in her mind) "*sold a possession and kept back part of the price*"

Out in the hall the half-hour struck, muffled and mellow
Then silence

"God, if he did it, I can't live—can't live God?"

Suddenly the happenings of the day seemed to blur and run together, and there was a moment, not of unconsciousness, but of profound indifference Her capacity for feeling snapped But when she tried to rise, her whole being was sick, so sick that again the soul forgot or did not understand, and heard, with dull curiosity, the body saying, "No, No " She steadied herself by holding on to the bookshelves, and then, somehow, she got upstairs It was the sight of the soft, gray dress, with its pretty laces, that stung her awake That dress was it hers? Was she to put it on? Was she to go and sit at the head of that shining table down in the dining-room?

"But, you know, I—*can't*," she said aloud, her voice hoarse and falling¹

—Margaret Deland "*Many Waters*"

OFF FOR THE FRONT

(Leon Kantor, who by virtue of his own genius and by the efforts of a doting mother, Sarah Kantor, has risen from abject poverty to be a distinguished violinist, bids good-by to his family to be a soldier in the first World War)

Suddenly there burst in Abraham Kantor, in a carefully rehearsed gale of bluster

¹ From *R J's Mother, and Some Other People* Copyright, 1908 Harper & Brothers Reprinted by permission

"Quick, Leon! I got the car down stairs Just fifteen minutes to make the ferry Quick! The sooner we get him over there the sooner we get him back I'm right, mamma? Now, now No water works! Get your brother's suitcase, Isadore Now, now! No non sense! Quick—quick——"

With a deftly maneuvered round of good bys, a gripping dash for the door, a throbbing moment of turning back when it seemed as though Sarah Kantor's arms could not unlock their deadlock of him, Leon Kantor was out and gone, the group of faces point etched into the silence behind him

The pool, mute face of Mannie, laughing softly Rosa Kantor crying into her hands Esther, grief crumpled, but rich in the enormous hope of youth The sweet Gina, to whom the waiting months had already begun their reality

Not so Sarah Kantor In a bedroom adjoining, its high-ceilinged vastness as cold as a cathedral to her lowness of stature, sobs dry and terrible were rumbling up from her, only to dash against lips tightly restraining them

On her knees beside a chest of drawers, and unwrapping it from swaddling clothes, she withdrew what at best had been a sorry sort of fiddle

Cracked of back and solitary of string, it was as if her trembling arms, raising it above her head, would make of themselves and her swaying body the tripod of an altar

The old twisting and prophetic pain was behind her heart Like the painted billows of music that the old Italian masters loved to do, there wound and wreathed about her clouds of song

But I've a rendezvous with Death
On some scarred slope of battered hill,
When spring comes round again this year
And the first meadow flowers appear ²

—Fannie Hurst *Humoresque*

Unity of effect—

It will be observed that each of the two passages just quoted is dominated by a single mood This observation

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leads us to the consideration of another characteristic of the short story—unity of effect—a characteristic, as Poe discovered, which gives the short story its individuality and which distinguishes it from the novel. Because the short story is brief, the reader may peruse it at a single sitting and thus be moved by it in its totality without those interruptions that commonly occur during the reading of a novel. According to Poe the very first step in the writing of a story is to decide upon the effect to be wrought. He says “If the very initial sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then he [the literary artist] has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established end.” This statement is historic, it announced to the world that a new literary type had been discovered.

How is this unity of effect to be achieved? Obviously, by the author’s experiencing a mood and by his writing his story with that mood controlling his every statement. The student is already acquainted with dominant tone in its application to individual passages of description. The same dominant tone may be extended to an entire short story, not only to the description in it, but to every other part. All the details of the story are selected under the influence of one mood, and consequently they yield one effect. The good short story proceeds from a single mood just as surely as the lyric poem.

EXERCISE

1 Write a brief but vivid narrative concerning what happened during one of the following moments. Try to convey to the reader an emotion kindred to the one which you experienced when you actually passed through the event. Instead of writing in the first person, you may select a fictitious name and use the third person, if you so desire. Make any

changes needed to heighten the effect Your finished narrative will not be understood to be entirely autobiographical, it will, however, have its foundation in an actual emotional experience which it is your main object to reproduce

- a The moment when you took the floor to address an audience (Do not tell about the whole speech but just about the few seconds when you were getting up, taking your place, and beginning)
- b The moment after a tragedy befell you (Do not go into detail about the tragedy, concentrate on the moment after it happened)
- c The moment when you passed through the most exultant experience of your career
- d The moment when a great responsibility suddenly came to you
- e The moment when you received a stinging insult, a harsh criticism, or a reprimand, or met a cruel and unexpected defeat
- f Any other moment of your experience which may be suggested by the foregoing parts of the exercise

2 THE CONFLICT

Source of conflict in strong desires—

The short story in the final analysis is concerned with the conflicts occasioned by human desires Somebody wishes for something, perhaps tremendously, tries to get it, meets with strong opposition, and, after a struggle, wins or loses The best short stories, therefore, are pictures of people fighting against obstacles for goals of various kinds, consequently, anyone looking for short-story material will do well to trace in actual experience the history of thwarted desires Somebody desires revenge for an affront given by a relentless enemy, or somebody desires something which his wife or his father or someone else does not

desire him to have, or somebody desires to live another kind of life than the kind which enslaves him, or somebody may desire simply to save his life, when his life is threatened by enemies or by the forces of nature, or, most pathetic of all, someone may have a desire of which he does not even know the existence and may be contending against obstacles all the more dreadful because he only vaguely guesses what they are. Various, subtle, and intense are the desires which drive onward the human race, each contains the germ of a novel or a short story. But we are interested now in seeing something of how the conflict should be managed.

First, the conflict should be made to seem important. The stakes should be high. When such serious issues as human life, domestic happiness, honor, love, social position, friendship, or the spiritual welfare of an individual are involved, their importance will be obvious without that importance being insisted upon. Successful short stories, however, are written on themes much less serious, such as athletic contests, or spelling matches, or the affairs of children. If the author chooses such a theme, he may add to the success of his story by introducing contributory factors which make victory doubly or triply desirable. In a story where a football game is the center of interest, the hero, while he is bringing victory to his side, may also win a sweetheart who is observing the game from the grandstand. In Ralph D. Paine's story, *The Freshman Full Back*, the hero brings about a transformation in the life of his father by his display of grit on the field. A student once wrote a successful short story which centered about an old-fashioned spelling match. The rival of the heroine in the spelling match was also her rival in love and her rival for a teaching position in the school where the contest occurred.

In brief, if the story is to be interesting, the conflict must be recognized by the reader as being decidedly worth while. For an important goal contending forces may be expected to struggle hard. This brings us to our next step in the discussion. The conflict must be close and strenuous, and the respective strengths and weaknesses of the opposing sides must be sharply emphasized.

Accentuating the intensity of the conflict—

First let us consider the adventure story in which a detective searches for a criminal, or the hero fights against bandits or animals, or two parties seek hidden treasure, or two physical forces clash for some other cause. In such a struggle, the hero must be thrown into a situation that will test all of his strength and resources. The opposition against him must be as strong as it can be made, and yet, in spite of the huge obstacles, he must be given a chance to win. On each side we have a series of strengths and weaknesses, the aggregate strength in each case being a matter of conjecture on the part of the reader. Suppose we represent the positive and the negative elements of the side opposed to the hero thus, $a - b + c + d$, and the positive and the negative elements on the hero's side thus, $x - y - z$. The plus x of the hero at first may seem woefully inadequate to offset the strong forces arrayed against him, but in the end it may prove sufficient to bring about a triumph all the more brilliant because of the difficulties which have been surmounted. On the other hand, the minus b of the opposing forces may prove for them the fatal link in the chain.

Lincoln Colcord's story *The Game of Life and Death* is an example in point. Here a band of bloodthirsty pirates boards a richly laden boat which has been detained by a storm off the Chinese coast and kills all the crew but the

American captain and his Chinese friend, Lee Fu. The American captain is in a panic. His Chinese friend, however, is a splendid poker player, a stoic in philosophy, and a man of almost unbelievable resourcefulness. Will he, with these assets, be a match for the large band of pirates, all well armed? Mr. Colcord takes up much of the space of his story and arouses keen suspense by vividly emphasizing and by balancing against each other the power and the unscrupulous character of the pirates, and the apparent helplessness of the two men on one side, and the stoicism and the resourcefulness of Lee Fu on the other.

In another type of story very much favored by contemporary writers of fiction, the conflict is between a character and his environment—which may be much more formidable than a human adversary. In such a story the writer must accentuate on the one side the desires and the temperament of the hero, and on the other side the unfitness of the environment for such a character. Let us set down beside each other several contrasting passages from Willa Cather's *Paul's Case* and observe how intent the author is on showing the conflict between hero and environment.

1 PAUL

It was Paul's afternoon to appear before the faculty of the Pittsburgh High School to account for his various misdemeanors. He had been suspended a week ago, and his father had called at the Principal's office and confessed his perplexity about his son. Paul entered the faculty room suave and smiling. His clothes were a trifle out-grown, and the tan velvet on the collar of his open overcoat was frayed and worn, but for all that there was something of the dandy about him, and he wore an opal pin in his neatly knotted black four-in-hand, and a red carnation in his button hole.

2 PAUL AT THE SYMPHONY

When the symphony began Paul sank into one of the rear seats with a long sigh of relief, and lost himself as he had done before the Rico. It was not that symphonies, as such, meant anything in particular to Paul, but the first sigh of the instrument seemed to free some hilarious spirit within him, something which struggled there like the genius in the bottle found by the Arab fisherman. He felt a sudden zest of life, the lights danced before his eyes and the concert hall blazed into imaginable splendor.

3 PAUL AT HOME

The men on the steps—all in their shirt sleeves, their vests unbuttoned—sat with their legs well apart, their stomachs comfortably protruding, and talked of the prices of things, or told anecdotes of their various chiefs and overlords.

On this last Sunday of November, Paul sat all the afternoon on the lowest step of his "stoop," staring into the street, while his sisters, in their rockers, were talking to the minister's daughters next door about how many shirtwaists they had made in the last week, and how many waffles someone had eaten at the last church supper.

4 THE END OF THE CONFLICT

The sound of an approaching train woke him, and he started to his feet, remembering only his resolution, and afraid lest he should be too late. He stood watching the approaching locomotive, his teeth chattering, his lips drawn away from them in a frightened smile, once or twice he glanced nervously sidewise, as though he were being watched. When the right moment came, he jumped. As he fell, the folly of his haste occurred to him with merciless clearness, the vastness of what he had left undone. There flashed through his brain, clearer than ever before, the blue of Adriatic water, the yellow of Algerian sands.

He felt something strike his chest—his body was being thrown swiftly through the air, on and on, immeasurably far and fast, while his limbs gently relaxed. Then, because the picture making mechanism was crushed, the disturbing visions flashed into black, and Paul dropped back into the immense design of things³

These few brief selections very inadequately indicate the poignancy of a struggle to the development of which the entire story is devoted, and which the author illuminates from many different angles. The main point of the illustration, however, should be clear—the point that a short story is built around a conflict.

EXERCISE

Write a brief but vivid narrative of a few hundred words concerning a desire impossible of achievement. Describe the characters involved and place them in a situation which brings the desire to a focus and which also shows the impossibility of its attainment. The exercise calls not for a complete short story but for an impressionistic vignette. Write on one of the following subjects or on a similar subject of your own choosing.

- a A plain girl who longs for a romantic lover
- b A mother who longs for her daughter to succeed in a musical career. The daughter is unmusical and unintelligent, but willing.
- c A young man without any literary ability who longs to be a poet.
- d An unaccomplished school teacher who longs to be an actress.
- e A business man who longs to be cultured.
- f A teacher with hundreds of papers to read who longs for an imaginary world which does not exist.

³ Reprinted from *Youth and the Bright Medusa* by permission of and special arrangement with Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., authorized publishers.

- g An ignorant miner who longs to be an astronomer
h An inefficient and powerless minister who longs to purge
his city of vice

3 THE SOLUTION

After the writer has arranged for bringing into conflict two strong and equally matched forces, and after these forces are engaged, he must find an original and plausible solution to terminate the struggle. This is often a difficult part of the story. The reader will be equally offended by a hackneyed or by a far fetched solution.

The unexpected solution—

When the story is one of mystery or adventure in which the conflicting forces are external and physical, the solution should be adroit and unexpected. In *The Game of Life and Death*, for which the conflict was given above, Lincoln Colcord finds his solution in a game of poker. When the pirates enter the room where the American captain and Lee Fu are stationed, they unexpectedly discover the two playing poker. The pirates, themselves passionately fond of the game, wait to see the outcome of a contest played under such unusual circumstances. Lee Fu, superbly resourceful and stoical, finally maneuvers the situation about so that he, quite naturally, may challenge the pirate chieftain to a poker game. On this game he stakes the boat, his life, and the life of his friend, and wins. If a good writer discovers a solution like this, his story is practically made at the start. Many stories have doubtless been written because the writer finds first of all a promising solution, the unusual nature of which prompts him to set about looking for other material to fit it. Poe, indeed, advised starting the story with the solution and working back from it to the beginning.

The realistic or commonplace solution—

In the kind of story which we have just been discussing the chief interest is in situation. The character story, on the other hand, seeks first of all for a solution which is true to human nature. The end must be in keeping with the inner lives of the characters and with their environment. Here, a unique solution of the conflict, although it is desirable if appropriate, is of secondary import. Thus in Theodore Dreiser's *The Second Choice*, the heroine finally makes the very unexciting resolution to go back to her commonplace lover. Her romantic lover has gone apparently forever. She has to choose between pining in solitude and living a prosaic domestic life. The very point of the story is to show the inevitableness of her choice. The story ends with her going from her room to an unlovely kitchen and setting the table for her mother. The solution of *The Second Choice* is characteristic of some of the best contemporary short fiction.

EXERCISES

1 Write a colorful and effective narrative of a few hundred words on one of the following situations. Find as unique and as original a solution as you can.

- a A student is working late at night in a biological laboratory. A thief enters for the purpose of stealing some cultures of deadly germs. He already has possession of the germs, enough to destroy a city full of people. The student by his quick wit recovers the cultures.
- b A murderer, in an effort to escape detection, attempts to enter college—the one you are attending—as a freshman. He appears before the entrance board in a room where many students are gathered during registration. One of the entrance examiners becomes suspicious. The murderer draws an automatic. The

situation is successfully met by someone's quick wit rather than by violence

- c Two girls are making fudge in the kitchen. A dangerous gorilla which has escaped from a zoo suddenly enters through the window. The girls successfully manage the situation without outside help. (If you take this subject, it will probably be advisable to read about the habits of gorillas before you begin.)

2 Write a colorful and effective narrative on one of the following subjects involving character rather than a physical situation. Find a plausible solution, as true to human nature as you can make it.

- a A father finds his son, who is a modern young man and who is intensely interested in biology, reading Darwin's *The Descent of Man*. The father summarily orders him to stop reading, to burn the book, and to give up his belief in evolution.
- b A young clergyman, very honest and even tempered, but of an independent turn, takes a short ride in a taxi cab just after he has arrived in a strange city. The driver at the termination of the ride asks him for what seems to him an outrageous sum as fare. Much to the minister's own surprise, he feels a wave of indignation surging through him. He refuses point blank to pay a cent, and the taxi driver threatens to call the police.
- c A high strung young college instructor is reading Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale* to his class. A young woman, a junior, seems to him to be inattentive. He orders her to leave the room. She also is highly strung. The two have a clash on the spot. (If you take this subject, it will be advisable to read Keats's poem first.)

4 CONTRAST

Deep down in human nature is embedded a love for contrast which enters into the principles of aesthetics and

which, accordingly, is reflected in the arts. We find contrast to be one of the fundamental elements of musical compositions, as where tempestuous and peaceful strains are sounded in successive moments. We find it in painting, as where dark shades and light shades are set off against each other. We find it in the arts of dress and of household decoration. Thus the successful artist, no matter what the form of his art, is likely to be dependent upon contrast for his effects, and in no art is he likely to be more dependent upon it than in writing. It is present in poetry, in the drama, in the novel, in the short story.

Contrast inevitable in the short story—

The possibilities for contrast in the short story, as in all other kinds of narration, are so far reaching as almost to defy enumeration or classification. It is difficult to conceive of a short story into which the element does not enter, if not fundamentally, at least incidentally. Perhaps our purpose of showing the effectiveness, almost the inevitableness, of contrast may be best accomplished by citing a few random examples. In Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, the center of interest is in the contrast between the goodness and kindness of Dr Jekyll on the one side and the utter wickedness and malignity of Mr Hyde on the other. In *The Sire de Malétroit's Door*, by the same author, the diabolical cruelty of the Sire de Malétroit's countenance is relieved by the beauty of his soft white hands with the long, tapering fingers. In both Willa Cather's *Paul's Case* and Theodore Dreiser's *The Second Choice*, there is a colorful contrast between the romantic illusions of the chief characters and stern realities. In Lincoln Colcord's *The Game of Life and Death*, the solution of the story turns upon the contrast afforded by two men sitting quietly and intently over a game of

cards while a terrible massacre is going on around them In Poe's *The Cask of Amontillado*, the bells, the holiday attire, and the drunken antics of Fortunato are in striking contrast to the ghastly errand on which he is being conducted in the gloomy catacombs Thus we might go on finding elements of contrast in almost any short story which we might happen to select

EXERCISES

1 Write a colorful narrative a few hundred words in length on one of the following subjects Secure your effect by a liberal use of contrast

- a A football team outweighed at least fifteen pounds to the man plays a game against huge opponents The hero of the game is a diminutive quarter back The star of the other team is a veritable giant
- b Jack Robeson is a second string man The coach has not thought much of his ability to play left half In fact Jack does not look like a football player He breaks into the final game and amazes everybody including the coach
- c Jack Jordan is a red haired little fellow with a squeaky voice and stooped shoulders, but with a great deal of hidden fire which nobody suspects Nobody knows him He is an alternate on the debating team In the most important debate of the season he unexpectedly gets his chance
- d Helen Powell, an anemic and decidedly plain little girl who is almost dowdy in dress, goes to college Beautify her, transform her into a social butterfly, glorify her Then amaze somebody with her Center the narrative about this amazement
- e A husband and wife are almost exact opposites in looks, style of dress, and temperament In fact they look absurd together They are asked to entertain a humorist who comes to their village to lecture Center

your narrative about the arrival of the lecturer at their home and their initial efforts to entertain him

5 POINT OF VIEW

Point of view in description, discussed in an earlier chapter, ordinarily involves objects in one place and is directly concerned with the material aspects of things. Point of view in narration offers greater difficulties because of three chief complications. First of all, the point of view must be close up and in the midst of ever changing combinations of persons and things. Second, the characters and events may be widely scattered so that it is impossible to keep them all under observation by one person at the same time. Third, and most important, the point of view in narration involves the inner spiritual states of the characters, it assumes an expository responsibility in addition to a descriptive responsibility. Three chief points of view are possible in the short story. (1) The story may be told in the first person from the point of view of the chief character. (2) It may be told in the first person from the point of view of a minor character or of an observer who has no part in the action. (3) It may be told in the third person by the author, who assumes for the purposes of the story a rôle of omniscience, an omniscience either absolute or limited. Let us now consider the advantages and disadvantages of these three

First person narrator, the chief character—

When a story is told in the first person by the chief character, there is a distinct gain in plausibility whenever circumstances permit of that method's being used. In real life, when unusual events are related by an eyewitness, an eyewitness, moreover, who has played the chief part in them, we listen with increased attention and pleasure

This being true, why is it that so few stories are told in the first person from the point of view of the leading characters? There are several good reasons. First, the leading character is very often a person who would not be writing a story. It would be most unlikely and most unnatural that Sarah Penn, the unlettered farmer's wife of Mary E. Wilkins-Freeman's *The Revolt of Mother*, would ever under any circumstances commit her story to paper in any form in which it might reach the reader. Second, in a psychological story which deals with the conflicting emotions of the hero, this point of view will not do. Here the interest depends on a keen analysis or an impartial exhibition of the chief actor. His view of himself would not be sufficiently disinterested, or he might not be conscious of the significance of the conflict going on within himself. Imagine Paul in Willa Cather's *Paul's Case* trying to tell his own story. Third, the exploits of the hero may be so extraordinary and notable that he cannot do them full justice without seeming to be a braggart. Fourth, the main character may not be on the scene of action at all points. The plot may call for important transactions in his absence. Fifth, the hero's untimely death may militate against his telling the story.

There are, on the other hand, situations where the hero may be the recorder of the events of which he is the center. Such a situation is afforded in a humorous story like *The Black Poodle* by Frank Anstey, where the hero finds himself in a ridiculous dilemma. When the spirit of the story permits the hero to regard himself without great seriousness, perhaps even to make fun of himself, he may tell of the event without offending the reader's sense of the proprieties. Likewise the man who has done a deed which is highly discreditable to himself may be the narrator of his story. Poe's hero in *The Cask of Amontillado*

commits a murder in the catacombs. The very grotesqueness of the deed is intensified by the fact that the man who perpetrated it is the narrator. Occasionally there are situations which make this point of view peculiarly fitting.

First person narrator, a minor character—

We next have for consideration the possibility of the story's being told in the first person by a minor character. Upon first thought such a point of view might seem the ideal one. First, the story would gain in interest by having an eyewitness for the narrator. Second, this eye witness might laud the deeds of the hero in perfect taste. Third, he might report events which occurred when the hero was not present. Last, in a story where the interest centers in a study of the psychology of the hero, the minor character might readily play the part of an impartial and disinterested observer as in *The Verdict* by Edith Wharton. Stories told from such a point of view, although more common than the stories told from the point of view of the main character, are relatively infrequent. The most popular examples are the Sherlock Holmes stories of Conan Doyle. Perhaps the chief reason for the comparative infrequency is that the story often presents no suitable character to do the narrating. Men like Doctor Watson, the friend of Sherlock Holmes, are not always present to report events. Moreover, if the original situation does not involve a character who would be suitable to do the narrating, it is usually not feasible to invent one, for, as we have already learned, there should be the utmost economy of characters.

First person narrator, a non-participant—

The point of view now to be discussed is a compromise between the point of view just explained and the omnis-

cient point of view to be explained in the following paragraphs. We are here concerned with an observer who tells the story in the first person and who is not a participant in the action. He is an eyewitness of the events, and, at the same time, he has an aloofness which almost gives him the privileges of omniscience. The reader will credit him with undoubtedly having conversed in a neutral fashion with both the friend and the enemies of the hero and with having learned much from them. The reader may almost unconsciously identify this observer with the actual author, who will appear to have been on the spot where the supposed events took place. If such a point of view is adopted, the story must be told in complete objectivity and the author must waive the rights of complete omniscience which he so nearly approaches, for it would obviously be out of place for him, a mere observer, to tell what was going on in the minds of the personages he saw in action. Moreover, such a point of view is plausible only where the presence of such an observer would seem natural, as in the congested parts of a city, in such places the dwellers may well be supposed to see strange events and to behold them impartially as spectators.

Third person omniscient point of view—

The most useful, and the most common, point of view is that of the omniscient author. He does not enter the story at all. He is not obligated to tell the sources of his information, but is privileged to know everything that happens. He knows what goes on when the back of his hero is turned. He can tell what the hero thought the instant before his death. He may look steadily at events which occurred simultaneously in separated places. The secret thoughts, desires, and motives of the characters may

be to him an open book. In brief, he may seem to have overcome the limitations imposed by corporeal existence.

It is wise, however, not to take advantage of such absolute omniscience. The author will make his story more concrete and plausible if he imposes upon himself certain limitations. Thus, he may assume omniscience for only one of the characters and tell the story from the point of view of that character, but not in the first person. If he accepts such a limitation, he will view the other characters objectively and will not invade the privacy of their minds. He will let these characters be judged only by their appearances, their words, and their deeds. If, however, the exigencies of the plot seem to demand it, as when the main character is forced to disappear from view, he may suspend temporarily his omniscience in regard to this personage, and bestow it for a season upon another one. Finally, if he wishes, he may restrict his omniscience even more, he may refuse to enter the minds of any of his characters, he may assume a complete objectivity and may attempt to reveal them all, the main character included, by their appearances, their words, and their deeds. Although the beginner may not attain to a complete objectivity, he should attempt to approach it in so far as he can.

EXERCISES

- 1 Write on both of the following subjects
 - a Take one of the moments of your career of which you are the proudest. Narrate the event as vividly as you can in the first person, giving yourself full credit for your achievement without appearing offensively boastful.
 - b From among the list of your friends or acquaintances choose a person particularly gifted in some definite way. Put him in a position, imaginary if you wish,

in which this gift manifests itself brilliantly. You are present and have a small part in the achievement. Narrate the event as vividly as you can in the first person, your chief purpose being to reveal the wonderful talent, or ability, or skill, or genius of your friend as manifested during the event.

2 Write on one of the following subjects

- a Choose an actual occurrence which contains an emotional crisis, in which two or more persons have been involved in conflicting ways, and of which you have been an observer without being a participant. Touch this occurrence up by fictitious additions if such are needed to make a colorful narrative. Do not enter the narrative in the first person. Be omniscient so far as one of the characters is concerned, but manage the other character with complete objectivity.
- b The dean of one of the college or university departments comes to the room of two college men (or, if you prefer, the Dean of Women comes to the room of two girls). One student is a bookworm, and the other student has strong social aspirations. Each tries to entertain the dean by conversing in accordance with his own particular interest but with somewhat absurd results. Narrate in the third person what happened. Decide on one character with whom to be omniscient and two characters with whom to be objective.

6 TITLES AND NAMES

The title of a short story should be short and colorful, original without being far-fetched, and suggestive without revealing the outcome. The writer should consume no time in seeking for a title until the story is entirely completed, for an inspiration may come to him at any time during the period of composition.

Need of plausible names—

The names of the characters and of the places must sound plausible. The beginner runs the risk of choosing these too speedily. The first names to crowd his memory will probably be conventional ones which have lost their freshness because of repeated use in fiction. Some names, for reasons hard to explain, sound likely, while others do not. For example, H. B. Gathers as the name of Irvin Cobb's squire in *The Belled Buzzard* sounds convincing, whereas such a name as Squire Rutherford for the same character would not ring quite true. The student will do well to consult atlases, old catalogues, directories, and other prolific sources of the names of places and of people, and to select from these his names when his imagination fails him.

GENERAL EXERCISES

1. Select one of the many good collections of short stories edited for use in English classes. Read the stories carefully, making a careful study of the six phases of short-story writing discussed in this chapter.

- a *Limitation*—To what extent are the time, the place, and the characters limited? Does the story have unity of situation? Does it have unity of effect? If so, what is the effect?
- b *The Conflict*—On what desire does the action turn? What is at stake in the conflict? What are the forces engaged? How strong are these forces?
- c *The Solution*—What is the solution? Is it surprising? Is it plausible? Is it true to human nature?
- d *Contrast*—What examples of contrast are there in the story?
- e *The Point of View*—From what point of view is the story told? If the story is in the third person, is the author

omniscient with all the characters, or is he objective with some or all of them? Consider the possibility of another point of view than the one the author has used, and then try to decide why the author has chosen the existing point of view

- f Titles and Names*—Are the titles short? Colorful? Original? Far fetched? Just what is the relation of the title to the story? Are the names of the places and of the characters convincing?

2 In theatrical or moving-picture performances which you may attend in the near future, make a study of the limitations, the conflicts, the solutions, the contrasts, and the names and titles

SECOND SHORT STORY ASSIGNMENT

At the end of the preceding chapter on the Sources of Material for a short story, you were assigned a short story to write and to complete. If in the judgment of your instructor that story needs or merits rewriting, you may now make partial plans for rewriting it, although the rewriting of the story as a whole is to be assigned after the next two chapters. Answer the following questions and record your decisions in your notebook for later use

- a* What effect am I trying to secure in my story? Have I secured it?
- b* Have I limited the time, the place, and the characters sufficiently? Am I inclined to sketch happenings without being vivid? Do I emphasize the moments?
- c* What is my conflict? Have I emphasized that conflict sufficiently? Does it seem important and intense? If not, how can I make it so?
- d* What is my solution? Is it commonplace? Is it sufficiently powerful? If not, how can I make it so?
- e* Have I neglected to avail myself of any good opportuni-

ties for contrast? If so, where are they? and how shall I intensify these contrasts?

- f What is my present point of view? Is it the best one? Could I be more objective in my method? If so, with what characters, in what situations, and how?
- g Do the present names of characters and of places sound convincing? (If they do not, consult a telephone directory or other sources of names)

Students who are advised by the instructor to begin an absolutely new story should apply such questions as those above to this new material

The Characters of the Short Story

☛§ AT THE PRESENT TIME one of the chief interests of intelligent people is an interest in man himself as a phenomenon. What kind of animal is he? What is he capable of? To what limits will he go? Is he a clod, or has he in him a spark of divinity? What is he really like both in familiar and in neglected places? Can he make himself happier than he is? The modern short story reflects this interest in human character, so much so that the study of characterization in the short story deserves a chapter by itself.

1 DETERMINANTS OF CHARACTER IN THE SHORT STORY

Character versus situation—

A strong tendency in modern short fiction is to have the story grow out of character rather than out of situation, to bring a character with traits already determined into such a crisis as will best illustrate those traits. There

are many notable and, of course, highly desirable exceptions to this rule, stories where the author starts with a situation and moulds his characters only to meet the needs of that situation. A good example of this is O Henry's *The Gift of the Magi*. The selected situation involves a young husband and his wife who are to get into an amusing complication by exchanging gifts at Christmas time. The gift of each is purchased at the cost of a great personal sacrifice. The wife sells her hair to buy a chain to go with her husband's watch. The husband sells his watch to buy combs for her hair. O Henry here need not hesitate as to what kind of characters he will have. That is already determined for him. He must have a young couple whose love for each other transcends all other traits. On the other hand, let us take Katherine Mansfield's story *Marriage à la Mode*, another narrative which concerns the fortunes of a young married couple. The author is intent on showing the tragedy which comes into the life of the husband when his wife discards what she considers old fashioned domestic customs and follows a less conventional way of living. One feels that here the characters are all in all and that the happenings are secondary and are selected for the sole purpose of explaining the characters.

Significant and penetrating character portrayals are obviously more likely to result from deliberate attempts to exhibit character as the primary purpose than from chance strokes of character building determined by the needs of the plot. Furthermore, in the great short stories, characters rather than situations are usually in command. Stories with exciting plots may aid one to spend a delightful hour, but the stories which have the greater chance of finding a permanent place in literature are those which throw light on the mysterious and infinite shadows of

human personality The trend toward realism discussed in a previous chapter is really a trend toward a deeper study of men and women

The short-story character has one dominant trait—

The brevity of the short story ordinarily permits of the adequate development of only one dominant trait in the characters This limitation is in marked contrast to the breadth of characterization possible in the novel The novel often has for its primary interest the conflict of diverse traits within one and the same character, and is spacious enough for the writer to follow out the resulting ramifications and the train of situations proceeding from a complicated entanglement of motives Thus in *The Rise of Silas Lapham* by William Dean Howells, Silas Lapham is characterized by his blunt honesty, his pride in his success, his lack of culture, his ambition, and his love for his family Furthermore, he is only one of numerous characters There are his wife, his daughters, and the Coreys with their conflicting traits Time and space are obviously required to follow to their various conclusions the rival motives set in operation when all of these traits interact upon each other

The restriction of the short story which tends to limit it first to a few characters, and then to a single trait for each character does not at all mean that the short story is not true to life It simply means that the short story is limited to a prescribed field for its material The short story tends to be concerned primarily with crises in human life where a dominant trait is for the moment in the ascendancy and other traits are in partial or complete quiescence Life offers abundant material of this kind

One must observe a certain caution, however, in accepting this limited view of the characters of the short

story Although one trait may be dominant, other traits may be hinted at or even emphasized so as to make the created personages seem human and lifelike Take, for example, Isabel, the wife in Katherine Mansfield's *Marriage a la Mode* mentioned a few paragraphs above The dominant trait of her character emphasized in the story is the vivacious light-heartedness with which she plunges into the new mode and her easy scorn of the old-fashioned domestic standards Yet the author is careful to suggest a certain concern in her for her husband and her children, although only once, and that transiently, is this concern permitted to come into conflict with her enthusiastic acceptance of the new way of living If Katherine Mansfield had chosen to add to the present story an intense spiritual conflict between Isabel's desire for the new and her concern for the old, the story would have been considerably lengthened and altered An author has space to do only so much within the narrow confines of the short story

There is a type of story where the conflict is between rival traits in the main character *The Coward* by Maupassant is an example Here two dominant traits of the central figure clash—his pride and his fear, both of which accordingly must be emphasized The author, however, compensates for his liberality in bestowing upon his main character two dominant traits by excluding other characters from an important part in the action *The Coward* is a one-character story, and such any story is likely to be wherein the conflict arises from rival passions in one personage

The type versus the individual—

Another phase of characterization is now to be considered Shall the writer of a short story make his characters

typical of a race or of a class of people, or of a community, or shall he strongly individualize them? The answer depends on the purpose of the story. Sometimes the author's purpose is to exhibit the characteristics of the people of a given community, of a given nationality, or of a given profession or occupation. At another time he may desire to bring into his story an exceptional individual with strongly marked individual traits, as Sire de Maletroit in Stevenson's story. Allowing for this difference in purpose, certain general principles almost invariably obtain in the creation of characters, principles which become obvious when one contemplates men in real life.

In real life an individual, first of all, has characteristics common to all mankind. In a broad way all men look alike in that they all have the same general shape and anatomy. Likewise, broadly speaking, they are alike in their psychology, in their inner lives. There are basic emotions and impulses, like anger and affection, which all men have and which differ only in quantity in different individuals. Furthermore, each man has traits common to his race, his profession, or the community where he lives. One can usually tell a college professor, a business man, a minister, a farmer, an Italian, or a Southerner when one sees him, there are almost certain to be tell-tale traits which give the secret away. Finally, every man has certain spiritual and physical traits which make him different from all other men. Otherwise, we could not recognize one man from another.

Fiction will do well to emulate the conditions of real life. In the character of the short story three strata of characteristics may be present: the individual traits which set the character apart from his fellows, next, the traits which identify him with a class, and, lastly, the traits which are universal, which, striking a responsive chord in

the reader, make the character of interest to him. In brief, the character is likely to be both representative and individualistic, although in some stories the individualistic traits are emphasized, and in others the representative. Even though a typical character will serve the exigencies of the plot in some minor rôle, the author is usually careful to give even him some little individualizing touch for the purpose of making him seem real.

An illustration may help the student to see the combination of the typical and the individual as it has been worked out by an experienced writer. Let us take Hamlin Garland's *Up the Coolly*. Garland's purpose is to show the wretched lives which the farmers of the far Middle West lived at the time the story was written—in 1891. Does the author portray a typical farmer? He is wiser than to do only that. This farmer is typical in external appearances, in his dress, and in his unkempt condition. Otherwise Garland individualizes him as a man who is cast in a large mould, who has a native strength which would have carried him to almost any heights, but out of whom the original fire has burned so that it hardly even smoulders. The implication is that, if the sordid farm life can blast the hopes of a powerful individual like him, it must be terrible indeed. The following scattered passages will reveal something of the character of this man.

As they gazed in silence at each other, Howard [a brother who has come home on a visit from the East, where he is an actor] divined something of the hard, bitter feeling that came into Grant's heart, as he stood there, ragged, ankle deep in muck, his sleeves rolled up, a shapeless old straw hat on his head.

His brother was a man of great character. He could see that now. His deep set gray eyes and rugged face showed

at thirty a man of great natural ability. He had more of the Scotch in his face than Howard, and he looked much older.

He was dressed, like the old man and the boy, in a checked shirt, without vest. His suspenders, once gay colored, had given most of their color to his shirt, and had marked irregular broad bands of pink and brown and green over his shoulders. His hair was uncombed, merely pushed away from his face. He wore a moustache only, though his face was covered with a week's growth of beard. His face was rather gaunt, and was as brown as leather.

The two men stood there, face to face, hands clasped, the one fair skinned, full lipped, handsome in his neat suit, the other tragic, somber in his softened mood, his large, long, rugged Scotch face bronzed with sun and scarred with wrinkles that had histories, like saber cuts on a veteran, the record of his battles.

EXERCISES

1 In the foregoing passage from *Up the Coolly*, carefully pick out the details which are typical and those which are individualistic.

2 Select one of the characters of the story you are to write or rewrite a little later in connection with this course. Describe this person, including both typical and individualistic details. This characterization as such will not necessarily go into the story.

3 Choose one of the following subjects for an original characterization in which you blend the individual and the typical.

- a Your father, or some other relative, or someone else with whom you are very familiar.
- b A boy in the process of being turned into a fraternity man, or a girl in the process of being turned into a sorority woman, or a student in the process of being transformed into any state, the process as yet incom-

plete The character still has clinging to him vestiges of his native abode Also he has certain pronounced characteristics of his own

2 METHODS OF CHARACTERIZATION

After the writer has determined what kind of men and women his characters will be, by what methods will he unfold these characters to his readers? How shall he make them seem as real as living beings?

The author must know his own characters—

The first requirement is that the writer himself have a vivid conception of his fictitious personages He cannot make them vivid to others if they are only partly formed, hazy abstractions He must see them from top to toe with the eye of the mind He must know what kind of clothes they wear, what their faces look like, how their voices sound, and other such personal details They must be as clear to him as are the memories of his absent friends Not only must he know them in a physical way, but he must be definitely decided about their traits of character He should, in fact, know much more about them, physically and spiritually, than he actually expresses in words in his story Authors sometimes write brief, but complete, biographies of the chief characters whom they intend subsequently to use in their fiction, not that these biographies may ever appear in print, but that they may insure steadiness and clarity of portrayal when the time for composition has actually come The practice is a good one, and the amateur will do well to try it

Character revealed through exposition—

Once the writer has a firm grasp of his characters, how shall he impart their portrayal to his reader? One method

is to resort to what we called in an earlier chapter the expository short cut. The writer may tell us in so many words the secrets of their hearts and the riddles of their personalities. This method is sometimes useful and is frequently resorted to by good writers. But caution is required in its use. A helpful principle to remember is that the reader should become acquainted with a character in fiction just as he becomes acquainted with a man in real life, in four chief ways: (1) by his looks, (2) by his acts, (3) by his words, and (4) by what others say about him. Of these four ways, we have already considered the first somewhat fully in the chapters on description. It remains then to consider the revelation of character through action and through dialogue or speech.

Character revealed through action—

It should be remembered, first, that a momentous act is not always required to reveal character. The minor or even unconscious acts reveal the inner man. If a stranger comes into my room to talk with me, I voluntarily or involuntarily may begin to form an estimate of him as the ensuing conversation proceeds. My estimate is formed both from what he says and from what he does, the two sources of evidence operating coincidentally. Likewise in narration the two sources of evidence should supply their evidence coincidentally. The talking and the acting should be intertwined. I note how the stranger who has entered my room shakes hands, I note his gestures, his changes of position, the changing expression on his face as the conversation proceeds, his method of lighting his pipe and of blowing his nose, and his manner of taking leave of me. These acts are small and inconsequential in themselves, but in the aggregate they are significant and revealing. They tell me what the man who has just left

me is like The writer of fiction studies minutely just such acts as these in the people he meets, and, if a given occasion makes it worth his while, he may jot down in his notebook a few points for future use Then when he writes his next story, by material drawn from life he will illuminate and humanize the characters of his fiction, sparingly perhaps but effectively The following passage from Olive Schreiner's *The Buddhist Priest's Wife* will illustrate the significance of little acts when they are taken collectively

Many years ago in a London room, up long flights of stairs, a fire burned up in a grate It showed the marks on the walls where pictures had been taken down, and the little blue flowers in the wallpaper and the blue felt carpet on the floor, and a woman sat by the fire in a chair at one side

Presently the door opened, and the old woman came in who took care of the entrance hall downstairs

"Do you want anything to night?" she said

"No, I am only waiting for a visitor, when they have been, I shall go"

"Have you got all your things taken away already?"

"Yes, only these I am leaving"

The old woman went down again, but presently came up with a cup of tea in her hand

"You must drink that, it's good for one Nothing helps one like tea when one's been packing all day"

The young woman at the fire did not thank her, but she ran her hand over the old woman's wrist to the fingers

"I'll say good bye to you when I go out"

The woman poked the fire, put the last coals on, and went

When she had gone the young one did not drink the tea, but drew her little cigarette case from her pocket and lighted a cigarette For a while she sat smoking by the fire, then she stood up and walked the room

When she had paced for a while she sat down again beside

the fire. She threw the end of her cigarette away into the fire, and then began to walk again with her hands behind her. Then she went back to her seat and lit another cigarette, and paced again. Presently she sat down, and looked into the fire, she pressed the palms of her hands together, and then sat quietly staring into it.

Then there was the sound of feet on the stairs and someone knocked at the door.

She rose and threw the end into the fire and said without moving, "Come in."

The door opened and a man stood there in evening dress. He had a great coat on, open in front.

"May I come in? I couldn't get rid of this downstairs, I didn't see where to leave it!" He took his coat off. "How are you? This is a real bird's nest!"

She motioned to a chair.

"I hope you did not mind my asking you to come?"

"Oh no, I am delighted. I only found your note at my club twenty minutes ago."

He sat down on a chair before the fire.

"So you really are going to India? How delightful! But what are you to do there? I think it was Grey told me six weeks ago you were going, but I regarded it as one of those mythical stories which don't deserve credence. Yet I'm sure I don't know! Why, nothing would surprise me!"¹

A careful rereading of this passage may be necessary to show how deeply the author is indebted to little details of action for the revelation of character. It may be said that these little acts are only suggestions, only clues of character, that the final test comes with the crisis, that what a man does when he is confronted with a major situation reveals once and for all what his character is. All this is very true. But what is the nature of this

¹ Reprinted by permission of Frederick A. Stokes Company, authorized American publishers.

final revealing act? It is just what the action is in the passage quoted from Olive Schreiner's *The Buddhist Priest's Wife*—a composite of little details of action, all dominated and unified by the mood of the character when he passes through his crisis

EXERCISES

1 Carefully reread the passage from *The Buddhist Priest's Wife* quoted above, pondering on each detail of the action. Just how much is told about each of the three characters by these details? What kind of people are they?

2 As an experiment, try to characterize by action one of the personages of the story you are to write. Any point of the story may be chosen for the purpose.

3 Reveal through the details of action the character of one of the following personages in the given situations. The presentation is to be entirely objective—that is, do not tell in so many words what the characteristics are. Reveal these characteristics entirely through acts and words.

- a Your roommate when he performs his morning ablutions
- b Your father when he reprimands you
- c A professor when he assigns a lesson
- d Your doctor when he is at your bedside
- e Any other person whom you know well when he is engaged in some revealing activity

Character revealed through dialogue—

A glance at the passage just quoted from *The Buddhist Priest's Wife* will show that Olive Schreiner depends on dialogue as well as on acts to unfold her characters, that the two methods are used simultaneously. A passage from Katherine Mansfield's *The Daughters of the Late Colonel* discloses that characters are sometimes presented more nearly by dialogue alone. The colonel, the father

of Josephine and Constantia, has just died. He has been a father of the autocratic type and has dominated the life of his two daughters. The story shows how ridiculously and pathetically helpless the two girls are when the central influence of their life has been removed. As you read, notice how the two are characterized and differentiated by the dialogue.

"Do you think we ought to have our dressing gowns dyed as well?"

"Black?" almost shrieked Josephine.

"Well, what else?" said Constantia. "I was thinking—it doesn't seem quite sincere, in a way, to wear black out of doors and when we're fully dressed, and then when we're at home—"

"But nobody sees us," said Josephine. She gave the bed-clothes such a twitch that both her feet became uncovered, and she had to creep up the pillows to get them well under again.

"Kate does," said Constantia. "And the postman very well might."

Josephine thought of her dark-red slippers, which matched her dressing gown, and of Constantia's favorite indefinite green ones which went with hers. Black! Two black dressing gowns and two pairs of black woolly slippers creeping off to the bathroom like black cats.

"I don't think it's absolutely necessary," said she.

Silence. Then Constantia said, "We shall have to post the papers with the notice in them to-morrow to catch the Ceylon mail. How many letters have we had up till now?"

"Twenty three."

Josephine had replied to them all, and twenty three times when she came to "We miss our dear father so much" she had broken down and had to use her handkerchief, and on some of them even to soak up a very light blue tear with an edge of blotting-paper. Strange! She couldn't have put it

on—but twenty three times Even now, though, when she said over to herself sadly, “We miss our dear father so much,” she could have cried if she’d wanted to

“Have you got enough stamps?” came from Constantia

“Oh, how can I tell?” said Josephine crossly “What’s the good of asking me that now?”

“I was just wondering,” said Constantia mildly

Silence again There came a little rustle, a scurry, a hop

“A mouse,” said Constantia

“It can’t be a mouse because there aren’t any crumbs,” said Josephine

“But it doesn’t know there aren’t,” said Constantia

A spasm of pity squeezed her heart Poor little thing She wished she’d left a tiny piece of biscuit on the dressing table It was awful to think of it not finding anything What would it do?

“I can’t think how they manage to live at all,” she said slowly

“Who?” demanded Josephine

And Constantia said more loudly than she meant to, “Mice”

Josephine was furious “Oh, what nonsense, Con!’ she said “What have mice got to do with it? You’re asleep”

“I don’t think I am,” said Constantia She shut her eyes to make sure She was

Josephine arched her spine, pulled up her knees, folded her arms so that her fists came under her ears, and pressed her cheek hard against the pillow²

The management of dialogue to reveal character—

It is no easy task to make the characters consistently true to themselves in their speech through all the varying emotional stresses through which they may pass Frequently in writing a passage of dialogue, the author must

² From *The Garden Party*, by Katherine Mansfield Reprinted by permission of and arrangement with Alfred A Knopf, Inc Copyright, 1922

keep in mind all of the following objectives in addition to the delineation of character (1) to make the dialogue appropriate for the characters, (2) to make its tone fluctuate with changing moods, (3) to push forward into the action while the other objectives are being achieved

I Consistent with character—If the writer is to make the dialogue fit the characters, he must be very sure that he has a definite conception of the character he would create. He must know what that character's past life has been—for a man's past life will probably influence his speech to his dying day. A boy born in the slums will probably always show in his speech vestiges of his origin. Likewise the writer must take into consideration the character's present occupation, his social position, and his cultural attainment or lack of attainment. Lawyers, college professors, ministers, farmers, and factory workers alike usually betray their several callings in the words they utter, and so they should do in fiction. And yet, although the writer must imitate the dialogue of real life, he will soon discover that he cannot imitate it in every respect. He will find it useful to imitate the short sentences, the gestures, and the facial expressions which accompany speech and which register changing moods, but he cannot imitate everything; he must purge the discourse of some of its defects. In real life slang, dialect, profanity, and the influence of nationality or occupation may show themselves in almost every phrase or clause. The writer should diminish this abundance. Remembering that a little sometimes goes a long way, he should only occasionally reproduce such peculiarities of speech, should try to suggest them rather than crowd them in. Take, for instance, the following brief passage from Edna Ferber's *The Gay Old Dog*. Jo Hertz, the hero, at the time of the dialogue was an uneducated "baggy-kneed" bachelor

whose business of harness making was a failure because of the automobile industry. The grammar of the man was probably rather bad, and he probably could not utter so many words as he does in the passage without a glaring error or two. The author, however, only suggests his manner of speech. The student should ascertain the linguistic qualities of the passage peculiar to a man of Jo's stamp.

The following Thursday Eva would say, "How did you like her, Jo?"

"Like who? Jo would spar feebly

"Miss Matthews'

"Who's she?"

"Now, don't be funny, Jo. You know very well I mean the girl who was here for dinner. The one who talked so well on the emigration question."

"Oh, her! Why, I liked her, all right. Seems to be a smart woman."

"Smart! She's a perfectly splendid girl."

"Sure," Jo would agree cheerfully.

"But didn't you like her?"

"I can't say I did, Eve. And I can't say I didn't. She made me think a lot of a teacher I had in the fifth reader. Name of Himes. As I recall her, she must have been a fine woman. But I never thought of her as a woman at all. She was just Teacher."

"You make me tired," snapped Eva impatiently. "A man of your age. You don't expect to marry a girl, do you? A child!"

"I don't expect to marry anybody." Jo had answered.

And that was the truth, lonely as he often was.⁸

2 *Consistent with mood*—The writer should consider the mood of the character at the time he speaks. Jo Hertz's words in the preceding passage, for example, are

⁸From *Cheerful—By Request* by Edna Ferber. Copyright Doubleday Doran and Co., Inc. Reprinted by permission.

a vigorous expression of his state of mind. It is absurd to make a character utter a tame and colorless platitude when he is passing through a crisis in his life. His words must express his mood, whether it be anger, fear, pity, irritability, joy, or what not. How does a man of a given temperament speak, let us say, when he is charged with a grave offense of which he may or may not be guilty, or when he learns that someone profoundly trusted by him has been untrue, or when he has a quarrel with a brother whom he has loved? Note, in this connection, the following passage from Hamlin Garland's *Up the Cooily*. Note the vigorous expression of the mood of each character. The old man and the boy referred to are two hired hands and are not to be confused with the two chief figures of the controversy.

"Good morning," Howard cried cheerily, the old man nodded, the boy stared. Grant growled something, without looking up. These "finical" things of saying good morning and good night are not much practised in such homes as Grant McLane's.

"Need some help? I'm ready to take a hand. Got on my regimentals this morning."

Grant looked at him a moment. "You look it."

Howard smiled. "Gimme a hold on that fork, and I'll show you. I'm not as soft as I look, now you bet."

He laid hold upon the fork in Grant's hands, who released it sullenly and stood back sneering. Howard stuck the fork into the pile in the old way, threw his left hand to the end of the polished handle, brought it down into the hollow of his thigh, and laid out his strength till the handle bent like a bow. "Oop she rises!" he called laughingly, as the huge pile began slowly to rise, and finally rolled upon the high load.

"Oh, I ain't forgot how to do it," he laughed, as he looked around at the boy, who was eyeing the tennis suit with a devouring gaze.

"I shouldn't say you had," said the old man, tugging at the forkful

"Mighty funny to come out here and do a little of this But if you had to come here and do it all the while, you wouldn't look so white and soft in the hands," Grant said, as they moved on to another pile 'Give me that fork You'll be spoiling your fine clothes"

"Oh, these don't matter They're made for this kind of thing"

"Oh, are they? I guess I'll dress in that kind of a rig What did that shirt cost? I need one"

"Six dollars a pair, but then it's old"

"And them pants," he pursued, "they cost six dollars too, didn't they?"

Howard's face darkened He saw his brother's purpose He resented it "They cost fifteen dollars, if you want to know, and the shoes cost six fifty This ring on my cravat cost sixty dollars, and the suit I had on last night cost eighty-five My suits are made by Breckstein, on Fifth Avenue, if you want to patronize him," he ended brutally, spurred on by the sneer in his brother's eyes "I'll introduce you"

"Good idea," said Grant, with a forced, mocking smile "I need just such a get-up for haying and corn plowing Singular I never thought of it Now my pants cost eighty five cents, s'penders fifteen, hat twenty, shoes one fifty, stockin's I don't bother about"

He had his brother at a disadvantage, and he grew fluent and caustic as he went on, almost changing places with Howard, who took the rake out of the boy's hand, and followed, raking up the scatterings

"Singular we fellers here are discontented and mulish, ain't it? Singular we don't believe your letters when you write, sayin', 'I just about make a live of it'? Singular we think the country's goin' to hell, we fellers, in a two dollar suit, wadin' around in the mud or sweatin' around in the hay-field, while you fellers lay around New York and smoke and wear good clothes and toady to millionaires?"

Howard threw down the rake and folded his arms "My God! you're enough to make a man forget the same mother bore us!"

"I guess it wouldn't take much to make you forget that You ain't put much thought on me nor her for ten years" ⁴

It is instructive to observe how Garland has thrown himself into the writing of this passage of dialogue and how he has lived, as he wrote, the emotions of the quarrelling brothers so that every part rings true

3 *Consistent with writer's purpose*—The dialogue of the short story must be highly purposeful In real life, conversation is prone to tack and veer, to shift from point to point, to set out from nowhere and to arrive nowhere In the dialogue of fiction there must be steady progress to a goal, there must be purposiveness Thus the dialogue of fiction is likely to be more compressed than that of real life, to have a greater significance The dialogue of real life is likely to be idle chatter at the dinner table, the dialogue of the short story is forever rushing on to events of importance The foregoing passage from *Up the Coolly* is a good example of the point

A minor, but sometimes very vexing problem in the management of dialogue concerns the method of indicating the speakers as the conversation passes to and fro The writer must, of course, be on his guard against repeating to the point of monotony such colorless expressions as "he said," "he replied," and "he asked" The reader, however, will be less troubled by such repetitions than a highly self conscious amateur is likely to think Many a splendid page of dialogue has a surprisingly large number of "he says," as the reader may discover when he glances back over a story he has just enjoyed The monotony of

⁴From *Main Traveled Roads* by Hamlin Garland Copyright, 1891, by Harper & Brothers Reprinted by courtesy of the author

the colorless verbs of saying is often relieved by an accompanying descriptive phrase which explains the moods of the speakers. In such a statement as "said the colonel heavily, gnawing his gray moustache," the 'said,' even if it is a repeated "said," will be skimmed over lightly and the attention will fall on the more colorful part of the expression. Also the verbs themselves may occasionally be given a helpful descriptive quality as in "he blurted out," "croaked the old woman," and "he stammered." The latter device, however, may easily degenerate into an unpleasant affectation and annoy the reader more than would the "sais," the "replies," and the "answers." Sometimes, if the identity of the speaker is perfectly clear, the verb of saying and its subject may be entirely omitted. Some modern writers, Robert W. Chambers, for example, are very skilful in thus managing their dialogue. Much care should be taken, however, to prevent the reader from getting lost even momentarily.

EXERCISES

1 Reread and carefully study the passages of dialogue from *The Buddhist Priest's Wife*, *The Daughters of the Late Colonel*, *The Gay Old Dog*, and *Up the Coolly* quoted in the pages immediately preceding, observing in particular the following points

- a Do you notice any difference in the management of the verbs of saying in the passages from *The Buddhist Priest's Wife* and *The Gay Old Dog* on the one hand and those from *The Daughters of the Late Colonel* and *Up the Coolly* on the other? Did the repetition of the "he says" etc., bother you in any of these passages when you first read them?
- b Howard in *Up the Coolly* is an ex farmer boy turned actor, Grant has always remained on the farm. Is Howard's speech like that of an actor who is born

of theatrical parents and is brought up on the stage? Is his speech different from Grant's? If so, explain the difference in detail. Is Grant's speech as illiterate as you might expect that of an uneducated farmer to be?

- c What did Grant and Howard talk about—that is, what points did their quarrel immediately center upon? Was it natural that they should talk about these things, or do they seem dragged in? Does Grant show any signs of native but untutored oratorical ability?
- d State just what the differences are between the characters of Josephine and Constantia in *The Daughters of the Late Colonel*.
- e Just how, as nearly as you can determine without reading the whole story, does each one of the four passages advance the situation? Does each passage seem to get somewhere?

2 Write an experimental and provisional passage of dialogue such as may come at a critical point in the short story you are to write, or such as may be needed to reveal character.

3 Write a dialogue on one of the following subjects, revealing character, contrasting character where possible, suggesting by vocabulary and style of speech the occupation or cultural level of the speakers, adapting, vigorously and truly, the mood to the situation, getting somewhere, and managing carefully the verbs of saying all at the same time.

- a A heated and soul stirring argument between two students whom you know. They clash over religion, war, marriage, philosophy, death, immortality, the significance of life, communism, or some other serious subject.
- b A conversation in which a far-reaching decision about someone's future was finally reached.
- c A quarrel which touched the depths of two personali-

ties The persons should be relatives or close friends
Base the dialogue on fact

Finally, if the student would write dialogue well, he should study the speech of real life Every day we hear conversation going on about us, but so interested are we in the content of what is being said that we may not notice particularly the manner of it Throughout the book we have emphasized the necessity for close observation, and one of the foremost requirements for the writer of narration is to observe people while they talk, to observe the vocabulary, the ejaculations, the relation between the talker's speech and his occupations past and present, the length and construction of his sentences, the purposiveness of his discourse, and, above all, the manifestations of his moods in his speech

GENERAL EXERCISES

1 Reread the short stories which you read at the termination of the preceding chapter, this time to study the dialogue One learns as much about the technique of a story the second time he reads it as he does the first, and he may learn more If you are tired of those stories, however, you may find it more profitable to choose an entirely different group of stories for your purpose Note the following points in particular

- a* What controls each story—character or situation?
- b* To what extent is each main character or are the main characters persons of one dominant trait?
- c* Which prevails in each main character—the typical or the individual? If one or the other prevails, to what extent is the other present?
- d* To what extent are the characters revealed through action and through dialogue in contrast to ordinary exposition?
- e* Study closely the management of the dialogue as to its

appropriateness to the character and to the situation and as to its purposefulness. Note also the management of the verbs of saying and the devices employed to indicate shifts in speakers.


2 In contrast to the stories which you find in the carefully selected groups of the textbooks read a number of stories found in the very popular weekly or monthly periodicals. Do you notice any superiority of characterization or any greater depth of characterization in the stories usually selected by college professors for the textbooks than in the stories of the cheap periodicals? If so, in what do this superiority and depth consist?

THIRD SHORT STORY ASSIGNMENT

Reach a decision as to the following points for the writing of the short story to be assigned after you have studied the next chapter. The present decisions, of course, are provisional and may be changed whenever you get a better idea. Record, however, your present conclusions in your notebook.

- a* Is my story to be a story primarily of situation or of character?
- b* What is to be the dominant trait of each of my main characters? Will any secondary traits need to be stressed?
- c* To what extent shall I individualize my main characters?
- d* How much shall I reveal my characters through ordinary exposition and how much through action and dialogue?
- e* What will be the style of discourse of my main characters? To what extent will occupation or nationality or intellectual attainment determine their speech? How much dialogue will be necessary? How shall I effectively and truly represent their moods? How shall I make the dialogue move swiftly?

Writing the Short Story

 THE PECULIAR DIFFICULTY of constructing a short story is occasioned by the fact that so much has to be done in so little space. The situation must be unfolded, the characters must be introduced and developed, the action must begin and pass through a crisis to a conclusion, and pleasurable, or even profound, emotions are to be evoked—all within the space of a few thousand words. The conditions call for both dexterity and profundity. The essential thing for the writer to consider in planning his story is that his space is limited, that his effect must be gained speedily.

1 THE BEGINNING OF THE STORY

There are two ways to begin a story, both widely used. The writer may plunge at once into the midst of things by beginning with a definite scene, and later, as opportunity affords, may interweave the necessary explanations and the descriptions of the setting and of the characters. This method decidedly has its advantages as is proved by its wide use. First, the reader is impatient to get into his story, and the prompt beginning brings him at once

into the main event without having to be introduced to strangers and places in which he is not yet interested. Secondly, the immediate plunge into the action does away, sometimes to a surprising degree, with the need for explanations which otherwise must be made. It is remarkable how much the reader can guess about the characters and the situation when he sees the personages acting and talking. Notwithstanding the obvious advantages of the prompt beginning, many stories do not begin in this way, but rather with preliminary explanations and descriptions. A very common formula of construction consists of an introduction of solid prose followed by a series of scenes where the text is broken by dialogue. This method may be resorted to especially when the subject matter of the introduction is interesting for its own sake.

2 INTERNAL ORGANIZATION

Six important principles should be followed in the construction of the interior of a story —

- 1 Select phases of the material to accentuate and to expand into scenes. The number of these phases should be reduced to the lowest possible minimum. The effect which the story is to produce should be the sole arbiter in the selection of the phases.

- 2 Contrive to keep the different phases of the story in the same setting as nearly as possible—that is, in the same house or in the same town or on the same farm, etc. If possible, the action should occur in the same place, or should return again and yet again to that place. Thus violent lurches of the attention are avoided.

- 3 Contrive to keep the different phases of the story as continuous in time as possible. Intervals of considerable duration, however, are sometimes necessary.

- 4 Sketch over as speedily as possible what happens in

the gaps between the phases. What happens in a year may often be told in a brief paragraph or two. What happens in ten minutes may require four or more pages of vivid description and dialogue for adequate development. Thus the writer is enabled to keep hammering away at the effect he intends to produce, to approach it from different angles, and never to forget it.

5 See to it that the situation at the end of each phase is different from that at the beginning. Each phase should mark a distinct advance.

6 Emphasize in some manner the closing of one phase and the beginning of another. On the stage at a corresponding point the curtain would fall. Sometimes in a short story the shift is indicated by double or triple spacing so that a conspicuous white space marks the transition. Sometimes Roman numerals are inserted. Sometimes, in addition to one or the other of these devices, or in place of it, the author conveys the effect of transition by a momentary slowing down while he sketches the altered circumstances which affect the fortunes of his characters in the interval, or while he describes the altered setting—thus suggesting the shifting of stage scenery. Such transitions vary in length from several paragraphs to a sentence or even a phrase.

An analysis of the structure of a few stories of recognized merit will reveal the way in which experienced writers have managed their material.

Analysis of Maupassant's *Little Soldier*

Maupassant's *Little Soldier* concerns a tragedy in the comradeship of two simple Breton soldiers. Each Sunday as soon as they are relieved from duty, they are accustomed to go to a wood near Champioux to a spot which reminds them of their native land. In their simple fashion they enjoy this

outing until a peasant girl passes that way and charms them. The more energetic of the two little soldiers wins her love, whereupon the other is heart-broken and drowns himself. The effect secured is a sense of the pathetic tragedy involved when the life of even one of the most humble of men is broken, and when no one is particularly to blame. What phases does Maupassant select for accentuation? What does he pass over hastily? How does he join the parts? Note the following analysis:

- 1 A rapid exposition, telling of the weekly outing of the two little soldiers, Jean Kerderen and Luc le Gandec and characterizing them individually and collectively. Two and one half pages. Double spacing at the end.
- 2 *Phase 1*—The first Sunday in the wood. The peasant girl is introduced. Dialogue and incisive description. One and one half pages. Double spacing at the end.
- 3 *Phase 2*—The second Sunday in the wood, a week later. Growing intimacy with the girl. Both soldiers are still on an equality with her. Gifts are exchanged. Dialogue. A little over a page. Double spacing at the end.
- 4 A hasty sketch of only seven or eight lines, revealing an important event. Luc le Gandec leaves the barracks on Tuesday and on Thursday without his comrade, visits the girl, and wins her love. Thus Maupassant subordinates a phase of the action which an amateur might have made much of—the secret meeting of the lovers. He does this so that he may not draw the attention of the reader from Jean Kerderen, about whom the effect of the story is to be centered.
- 5 *Phase 3*—The third Sunday in the wood, more than a week after the second phase. Jean Kerderen witnesses the love-making of his friend and the peasant girl. While he and his comrade are returning homeward, he jumps from a bridge into a river and drowns. Two pages.

The action of this story alternates between the barracks and the wood, most of it being in the wood. The total time

could have been two weeks, but between the second and third phases Maupassant wishes to give the impression of a gradual unfolding of events. He therefore leaves the exact time indeterminate.

Analysis of Kipling's *Without Benefit of Clergy*

Without Benefit of Clergy is a moving story with a setting in India. Reduced to its bald essentials, the plot is this: John Holden, an Englishman, without giving much thought to the matter, buys an Indian girl named Ameera, only sixteen years old, from the girl's mother. Presently he and the girl fall genuinely in love. From the outset the reader is made to feel a sense of insecurity in their happiness. Ameera always fears that her lover will forget her for the *memlog* or white women. A child is born to them, to which both are greatly attached. The child dies. Ameera dies. The effect centers around the pathetic spectacle of a love, strange, beautiful, and perilous, vanishing completely under terrible circumstances. The story is divided into three parts, which Kipling indicates by the Roman numerals I, II, and III.

I

- 1 *Phase 1*—In the cottage above the city. The story at once plunges into the midst of things. The beginning is often pointed to as a model of the prompt initial scene. It consists of dialogue between John Holden and Ameera concerning the expected child and shows Ameera profoundly happy, but with a lurking fear. A page.
- 2 A sketch explaining how Holden had purchased Ameera from her mother, how the three lived in a little house above the red-walled city, and how Holden is reluctantly forced to be gone two weeks on government business just about the time the child is to be born. Two pages.
- 3 *Phase 2*—In the cottage, two weeks after the first phase. The joyful return of Holden. A boy has just been born. Dialogue. Two pages.

In Part I five pages are devoted to what would not require over half an hour (Phase 1 and Phase 2). A little over half a page is devoted to sketching what happened to Holden during the two weeks of his absence. That absence is relatively unimportant. Kipling introduces it merely to give the characters something to talk about, to supply an event about which his exposition may center.

II

- 1 *Phase 1*—Six weeks later. On the roof of the cottage. The happy occasion of christening the child, whom they call Tota. Dialogue. Four and one-half pages. Kipling needs all this space to show how beautifully yet dangerously happy Ameera is—a happiness soon to be blasted. A greater effect can of course be made by blasting a great, strange, and beautiful happiness than by blasting an ordinary one. A short story, remember, deals with an effect. The christening is used as a mere device to unfold this happiness.
- 2 Sketch, tracing Tota's development to the age of possibly three or four years. Less than a page and a half. Double spacing at the conclusion to prepare the reader for the dramatic announcement of the next phase.
- 3 *Phase 2*—Many months, possibly several years after Phase 1 of this Part. At the cottage. Tota dies of a tropical fever. About one page. Vivid, but no dialogue.

III

- 1 *Phase 1*—Immediately after Part II. At the cottage. The devastating effect of Tota's death on Holden and Ameera developed chiefly by dialogue between them. Two and one-half pages.
- 2 *Phase 2*—At the club in the city, just after Phase 1. Holden hears of a threatened epidemic of cholera. One page. Dialogue.
- 3 Sketch. Two months elapse. The arrival of the deadly cholera is vividly announced. Two pages.

- 4 *Phase 3*—At the cottage Holden attempts to persuade Ameera to flee for safety to the hills She refuses because the white women go there One and one half pages Dialogue
- 5 *Phase 4*—At the cottage Ameera dies from cholera Dialogue One page
- 6 At the cottage, most of it The spirit of utter desolation in Holden, centering about the ruins of his cottage Two pages

The action of the story alternates between the cottage and the city, but insistently returns to the cottage The time is possibly three or four years Thus a contrast is offered with Maupassant's *Little Soldier* where the action is confined to about as many weeks Throughout the story we see Kipling deliberately and strenuously working to bring out a pre-conceived effect By various devices he builds up a picture of enchanting and bewitching loveliness and then ruthlessly tears it to pieces, filling the reader with a pleasurable melancholy

Analysis of *The King of Boyville*, by William Allen White

Piggy Pennington and his Heart's Desire are a boy and a girl in the early teens They live in a village and they attend a village school The story concerns a well known theme, childhood love in a rural community An amateur might start at the chronological beginning of the romance and attempt to sketch all of the events concerned, with the affair extending over several months, but not so Mr White

- 1 Exposition, a long one of a page and a half, explaining the character of the hero, Piggy He is a king among the boys but bashful with girls
- 2 *Phase 1*—The first day At Piggy's home, on the way to school, and home again Dialogue The action centers about a bouquet of roses which Piggy gives to his Heart's Desire She accepts them, and the affair is successfully launched
- 3 The next day Scene the same Piggy brings more roses,

but is disconsolate, because he fancies that the roses are not acceptable to his Heart's Desire

- 4 The next day Scene the same A happy termination, as the girl has one of Piggy's roses in her hair Piggy triumphant

The handling of the situation is interesting The time is reduced to exactly three days, the place in each phase is the same, and the whole affair is centered about the roses

Often in examining the organization of a successful short story one is struck by the simplicity rather than by the complexity of the underlying plan One observes that the writer must have saved himself many hours of effort by his discrimination in the selection of the parts, and that he is enabled to devote all of his narrative skill not to the entire mass of possible material but to the few parts which he has chosen to stress The reader who peruses the story for pleasure will probably not notice the plan at all, but it is there none the less

In conclusion to this section of the chapter, one word of caution should perhaps be given The writer of the short story needs to avoid a standardized and machine-like process in fashioning his material There must be liberty of procedure if writers are effectively to present through this literary type the profounder aspects of human nature In the paragraphs above just three out of hundreds of good short stories have been analyzed, only the broader principles of the technique of construction have been explained The student should broaden his knowledge by the very profitable task of making analyses of his own

3 MOTIVATION

We have just seen how the short story is divided into parts or phases It remains now to see how these parts

must be bound together by an underlying causal relationship. The close weaving of causal relationships is one element which makes short stories of the better type superior artistically to those found in the cheap magazines and to some of the most popular of the moving pictures. For example, in a certain picture recently presented, an English girl of pre-war days meets a Russian prince in Cairo, Egypt. He falls passionately in love with her, but she fears him and seeks to avoid him. At this point, the poor motivation enters in. Although she wishes to escape him, she goes to Russia—the worst of all possible places for her purpose. There, of course, she meets him, and many amazing adventures follow. Note, on the other hand, the motivation in Maupassant's *Little Soldier*, in which one phase of the narrative leads plausibly to the next. First, the two soldiers meet the girl. This leads to their falling in love with her. The next step is for the more aggressive of the two to outstrip the other in gaining her affections. As a result, the soldier who loses her drowns himself. Thus in a really artistic story we find a chain of causes linking the first part of the story to the middle part and this part to the end. Although it is not inevitably true that one phase must lead directly into the next phase, yet adjacent phases, if they are independent of each other, must contribute to a common significant result.

Important as is the principle which requires the parts of the story to be related by cause and effect, there is yet a deeper aspect of motivation. This concerns the fundamental truth of the events which give the story its cause of being. For example, in *Little Soldier* is it plausible that Jean Kerderen should drown himself as a result of what might be regarded as a very simple love affair? Maupassant makes it his business, at every stage of the story, to give this event plausibility. First, we are shown the si-

lent, but deep, affection of the two soldiers for each other, then the fascination which the lively peasant girl excites in both of them, and finally the exquisite torture which Jean experiences when he witnesses his comrade and the girl making love, oblivious of the fact that he exists. Likewise, in Kipling's *Without Benefit of Clergy*, would an Englishman like Holden in a responsible government position fall genuinely in love with an Indian slave girl like Ameera? The answer is easy. He certainly might fall in love with her if an uneducated slave girl, daughter of a sordid mother, could possibly be like the wonderful heroine whom Kipling so delightfully portrays. But is such a girl plausible? This is doubtful. Here is probably one of the situations where Kipling is romanticizing in the vein of Bret Harte and only masquerading in the guise of realism. If so, his story falls short according to the rigid canons of the modern realists. According to their standards, every character and every situation must be true to life, must proceed plausibly from actually existing conditions.

4 THE END OF THE STORY

The end of a story does not consist of a formal paragraph or paragraphs appended for the purpose of summary or, worse still, of stating the moral application. Its value is not to be measured by its length but by its effectiveness—its dramatic, its satisfying, its suggestive qualities. Sometimes the end may consist of a dramatic act or of dramatically spoken words. Sometimes it has a philosophic suggestiveness so that the reader at the very last is launched out into the universal. Frequently there is a combination of these elements. But whatever the nature of the ending, it should be provocative, should send the mind of the reader forth on a train of thought, or should awaken an

emotion which will not stop when the last word of the story has been read

In Chapter 14 the fact was stated that the essay of Addison often consists of a narrative told for the sake of illustrating a general principle definitely announced in so many words at the beginning or end. The modern short story at its best often has precisely the same purpose with two fundamental differences in execution—namely, that the narrative is much more vivid and that it stops short of announcing in words the expository significance of the events related, leaving the reader to draw his own conclusions. The writer adroitly, perhaps powerfully, brings the reader face to face with some profound truth of life and then, withdrawing, leaves him in the presence of it to question and to wonder. Thus the short story, without a trace of preaching or moralizing, is sometimes a more effective expository device than the essay itself. Granting this, it should yet be remembered that entertainment, not instruction, is the primary purpose of the short story. The profoundest pleasures of literature, however, are those which arise from a contemplation of life in an uncertain and mysterious world. Unusual events, whether in life or in fiction, often lead the mind to social or philosophic considerations of more compelling interest than the events themselves.

EXERCISE

1 In a brief but colorful and vivid narrative suggest—but only suggest—one of the following ideas. Make the narrative pleasurable, avoiding the didactic tone completely. Remember that much of the effectiveness of such a narrative depends upon the thought-provoking qualities of the ending.

- a Women are at last free from their old bondage and have found their rightful place

- b Notwithstanding modern inventions and scientific discoveries, there has been really no progress, we are after all but little removed from our primitive ancestors
- c Modern science is on a brilliant and poetic adventure at the very threshold of the truth regarding the old mysteries
- d There is a strong religious feeling abroad, different from the old, but more vital and profound
- e In spite of all the gaiety, there is much genuine tragedy in the undercurrents of college life
- f A similar idea of your own choosing

5 STYLE

The style of the short story, in so far as it is different from the style of other prose types, is imposed by two chief considerations, both imposed by the limitation of space. In the first place, the conditions call for speed. The reader is to be plunged with promptness into important events. The result is sometimes a rather obvious compression of style. The movement is prone to be quick and nervous, hurrying the reader on his way with the utmost dispatch. In the second place, the single effect to be secured in the short story proceeds best from a single mental attitude or emotional state on the part of the writer. This mood controls not only his material but also his manner of expression. If the short-story writer himself feels the mood which he would produce in his readers, then the problem of his prose style will be, to a certain extent at least, automatically taken care of. As a striking example of rapid movement in the prose style of a short story, the student may read Edna Ferber's *The Gay Old Dog*, and as a striking example of a mood's being sustained by a writer through an entire story and deter-

mining the manner of expression, the student may read Edgar Allan Poe's *Ligeia*

GENERAL EXERCISES

1 Reread the short stories which you examined at the close of the two preceding chapters, or, if you desire, choose a new collection of stories of generally recognized merit. This time study the following points

- a Study the technique of the beginnings. Do the stories begin by plunging at once into the action in definite scenes or are there expository introductions? If they begin promptly with scenes, when and how is the necessary exposition introduced?
- b Study the structure of these stories, making written analyses somewhat like those of Maupassant's *Little Soldier* and of the two other stories analyzed within this chapter. Keeping continually in mind the effect which the author wishes to produce, observe the division of the action into phases, the bridging over of the gaps between these phases, the duration of the action of the complete story and the duration of the individual phases, the place or places where the action occurs, and the impetus each phase gives to the action. Try to determine why the author accentuates certain phases and subordinates others.
- c Make a thorough study of the motivation. Observe not only the causal connections between successive phases, but the deeper causation growing out of the relation of the characters to their environment and the situation. Does the story in any respect lack plausibility?
- d Study the effectiveness of the endings. Just how does each story end—by a dramatic speech or deed, or by a comment of the author, or otherwise? Do the stories by implication illustrate any moral, or social, or

philosophical truths? Just what is the reaction produced in your mind by each story?

- e Study the style, concentrating your attention on two chief points. Is the movement rapid? Does the style seem to be controlled by a mood?

2 Make a study of the motivation in several short stories found in current magazines of the cheaper variety written for uncritical readers

3 Make a study of the motivation in several moving-picture performances of average merit

FINAL ASSIGNMENT OF THE SHORT STORY

1 In the planning of your own short story, reach a decision concerning the following questions

- a Shall I begin with an exposition or with a definite scene? If I begin with an exposition, can I make that exposition interesting? If I begin with a definite scene, will it be possible for me to interweave or introduce at a later point the necessary material? Can I improve my story by a rigid elimination of some of this material?
- b Is the effect to be secured by my story firmly established in my own mind? If so, what phases shall I accentuate and what phases shall I subordinate to gain this effect? Into how short a time can I condense the action without infringing upon a plausible motivation? To what extent shall I be able to concentrate the action in a single place? How much sketching over of events will be necessary between the various phases?
- c Is my story as well motivated as I can make it? Does one phase of the action lead to another or do the phases lead to a common significant result? Are the characters plausible? Are their acts plausible? Is

there any way in which I can give my story greater plausibility?

d Is my ending sufficiently dramatic or provocative?

2 And now put your notebook aside. Forget your previous efforts and do not attempt to build up your story by assembling scraps of your writing from here and there. Fix the general plan firmly in your mind, summon the emotion which you would evoke, determine to convey it to the reader by emphasizing a moving conflict, and write your story. If you think you can write a good story in some other way than by following explicitly these directions, go ahead. Do not feel tied down at a time when you have to soar.

Chart of Handbook

Numbers and Symbols

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2	456	case, predicate complement of finite verb
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4	456	case, nominative in apposition
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